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MANCHESTER REPERTORY THEATRE LTD.

ALL THE KING'S HORSES

Comedy in Three Acts

BY

CHARLES ELTON OPENSHAW

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ALL THE KING'S HORSES

PRODUCED AT THE GLOBE THEATRE, LONDON

on the 25th January, 1926.

WITH THE FOLLOWING CAST OF CHARACTERS

WILFRED EVERITT	.	.	.	.	.	.	— Allan Aynesworth.
ALICE (his Wife)	.	.	.	.	.	.	Irene Vanbrugh.
JACK (his Son)	.	.	.	.	.	.	Edward Scott-Gatty.
JILL (his Daughter)	.	.	.	.	.	.	Jill Esmond Moore.
ROGER ELRLINGTON	.	.	.	.	.	.	Arthur Pusey.
RICHARD HARDINGHAM	.	.	.	.	.	.	S. J. Warmington.
MRS. MAUNDERS	.	.	.	.	.	.	Mary Mayfren.
RUTH MAUNDERS	.	.	.	.	.	.	Miss Janet Eccles.
POWERS	.	.	.	.	.	.	Miss Ethel Wellesley.

SCENES

ACT I

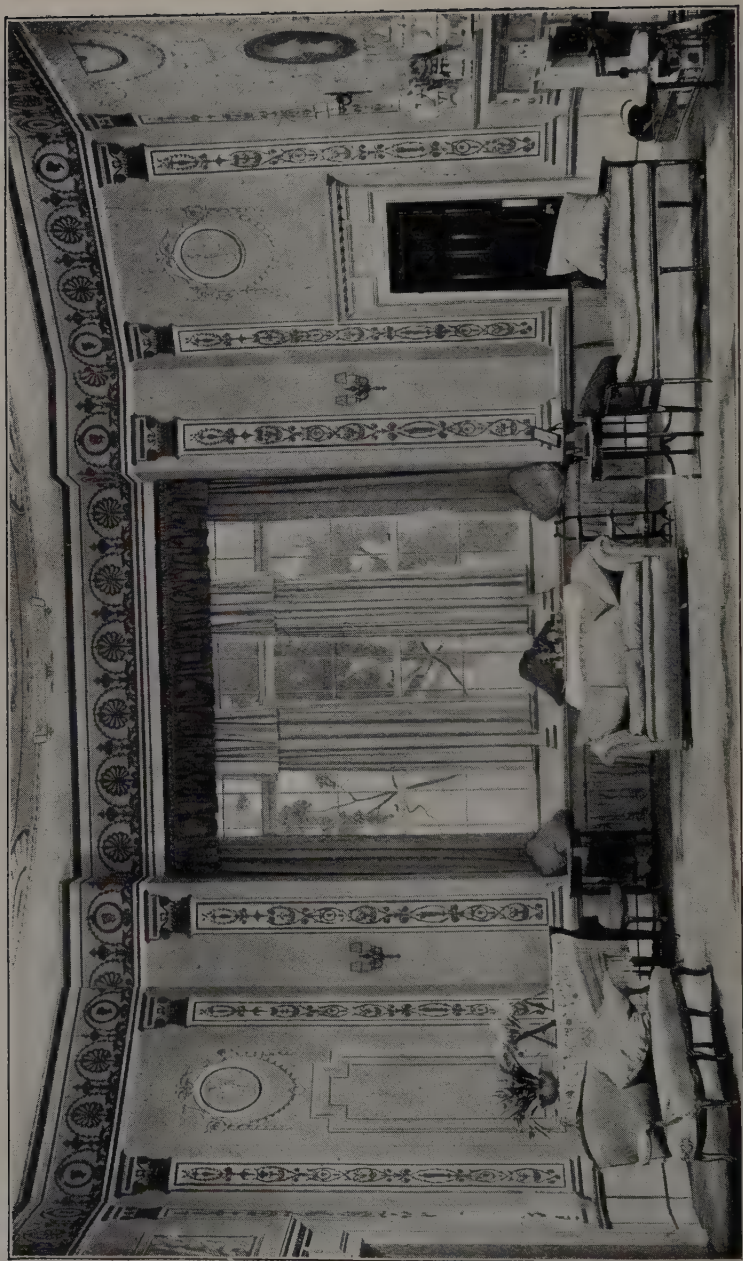
The drawing-room of the EVERITTS' house in South Kensington.

ACT II

The Library—the same evening.

ACT III

The Library—three days later.



ALL THE KING'S HORSES

ACT I

SCENE.—*The scene represents the drawing-room of the EVERITTS' house in South Kensington. It is a large oblong room with two doors, one to the R. facing the audience and one to the L. wall. The former leads to the landing, and the latter to the library. The furniture is luxurious, and everything is in excellent taste. The time is late afternoon on a winter's day, and the curtains are drawn. The room is softly lighted.*

(*N.B.—Right and left throughout are the spectators' right and left, not the actors'.*)

(*DICK is up at window, R. of it; he comes down looking at watch. POWERS and MAID enter with tray of tea-things. As door opens he turns thinking it is ALICE.*)

DICK (*near settee R.*). At last—— (*Pulls himself up as he sees who it is.*)

POWERS (*up at c. table, arranging tea-things*). The mistress will be down directly, sir.

(*MAID goes off door L., having put down tray, etc.*)

DICK. Splendid! Anyone else at home?

POWERS. No, sir.

DICK (*disappointed*). What! Not the children?

POWERS. Miss Jill and Mr. Jack haven't come in yet, sir.

DICK. How about Mr. Everitt?

POWERS (*with a surprised smile*). The master, sir? Oh, no, he's never home at this time.

DICK. No, no! Course not! (*Down R.*) He wouldn't be. (*Sits.*)

(*POWERS goes to fireplace and pokes fire.*)

POWERS. The mistress said if you cared to begin, sir, as it's getting rather late—— (*Getting up to door.*)

DICK (*going up and looking at table*). What! Trust myself among all those contraptions? Not likely!

POWERS. No, sir, the mistress thought perhaps you wouldn't. (*Moves to door.*)

DICK. You might tell her to hurry up, will you?

POWERS (*standing aside from door*). I think she's coming now, sir.

(*ALICE enters.*)

ALICE. Well, here we are! (*She meets DICK C. and he kisses her.*)

(*POWERS exits.*)

DICK. My dear, I've been waiting for hours.

ALICE. Rubbish, Dick! I heard you arrive two minutes ago.

DICK. Well, I've not seen you since yesterday and I hate wasting time. (*Brings her down, on his L. to settee L.*)

ALICE. Dear Dick!

DICK. After all, you're my only sister. Means a lot to be together again after—seven years!

ALICE. Only seven years! Surely it's longer than that? (*Her manner and voice are subdued. She is sitting on settee L.*)

DICK (*R. of ALICE*). Very tactful of you to think so, my love, but it's exactly seven.

ALICE. It's a great treat to have you, Dick.

DICK. It's a treat to me. (*Crosses over R. and then going up towards piano.*) Same old house, same old room. Nothing changed. (*Hand bus.*)

ALICE. No. (*With a sigh.*) We never change here.

DICK. And you in the middle of it . . . a fixture. (*Up near window.*)

ALICE. Oh, I'm part of the furniture.

DICK (*looking round. Coming down, patting cushions on C. settee.*) What always strikes me afresh when I come back is the extraordinary comfort . . . the softness; you should see some of the places I've been in.

ALICE. I wish I could, Dick.

DICK (*sitting on settee R.*). Not that I could stick this for long. Too many . . . too many cushions, don't you know. Still, it's soothing to see the inside of a decent English home from time to time. Eggs and bacon and roast beef and that.

ALICE. Yes. (*Looking round.*) I suppose it is picturesque.

DICK. And then the family. (*Rises and crosses behind ALICE on settee L.*) Jack and Jill and you and Wilfred. He's not changed, by the way? (*Now L. of ALICE.*)

ALICE. No.

DICK. Seems busier than ever. (*Below fireplace.*) Does he always work on Saturdays?

ALICE. Dear me, yes. And Sundays. He's head of the firm now, and it's a big concern. He's made it big.

DICK. Must be pie to him.

ALICE. It is. Pumpkin pie.

DICK. Rum old devil! Sorry . . . beg pardon.

ALICE. You needn't.

DICK (*looking at her intently*). Y'know, when I said nothing had changed, I was wrong. (*Sits L. of ALICE on settee.*) You have.

ALICE. Do you think so?

DICK. You're quieter than you used to be, sort of tired.

ALICE. I'm seven years older, Dick.

DICK. It's not that. It's . . . it's . . . Hanged if I know what it is, but it's there all right.

ALICE. Oh, you imagine.

DICK. Perhaps it's this deafness. That's new since I was home before.

ALICE. Not *quite* new. I was always threatened with it.

DICK. Funny thing. Never in the family. Have you seen anyone about it?

ALICE. No. I don't believe in doctors.

DICK. You ought to see someone.

ALICE. Perhaps I will some day.

DICK. It varies so. (*Rises, not looking at her.*) That's what I can't make out.

ALICE. I think the weather affects it.

DICK (*in a puzzled sort of way*). To-day, for instance, you seem to hear *perfectly*.

ALICE (*affectionately*). I can always hear you, Dick. (*She gives DICK her hand.*)

DICK. Altogether I'm a bit (*going to R.C.*) worried about you, Alice. I remember you so full of buck, and somehow, now . . . (*Turning to her.*) You're not unhappy, old thing?

ALICE (*sighs*). Not more than most people are.

DICK. We've always been pals. You'd tell me? (*R.C.*)

ALICE. Of course.

DICK (*ruminatingly. Coming to and sitting on table L. above settee L.*). You were such a devil in the old days.

ALICE. Who? I? . . . (*Casting her mind back.*) Was I really?

DICK (*getting out cake tobacco, cutting it and rubbing it in hands*). Lord, yes. You were what's known as a handful, and I was quiet and stodgy, whereas now . . .

ALICE. I'm quiet and stodgy, and you've become a handful . . . is that what you mean?

DICK. Ha! Ha! No. (*Filling pipe.*) I shall always be stodgy. I'm built that way. But what I miss in you are the jokes . . . and that little delicious twinkle.

ALICE. Twinkle! Me! It must have been in a *previous* life.

DICK (*rising from table and coming down R.C.*). And how the men all fell for it! Remember Jim Macfie?

ALICE (*with a roguish smile*). Yes.

DICK. And Sefton . . . and Freddie Armitage—and that Beresford boy.

ALICE (*laughing*). Dick, don't! It sounds like a harem.

DICK. Always thought you'd marry one of *that* crowd. *Never* Wilfred. (*Pats pockets for matches, crosses to fireplace and lights pipe.*)

ALICE. I did think of Jim! Poor dear, he's gone to the dogs since. I wish I could believe it was my doing, (*laughs*) but it was just inclination.

DICK. And you were so fetching to *look* at, too: like a plump partridge.

ALICE. Well, you needn't talk as if I were dead. I'm still plump.

DICK. Plump! You're fat.

ALICE (*she throws a cushion at him*). Damn you, Dick!

DICK. Hurrah, (*catching cushion and placing it L. of her on settee*) I've got a rise out of you at last! I knew there must be something under the extinguisher.

ALICE. Well, you *shouldn't* get a rise out of me. It's . . . it's . . . it's *undignified*.

DICK (*shocked*). I say! My love! What a word to use!

ALICE. It comes natural to me . . . now.

DICK (*looks reflectively at her*). H'm! . . . you've certainly changed. (*Goes round L. behind settee to table.*) Stultifying effect of matrimony, I suppose. (*He picks up a book from a table and turns over the leaves casually.*) Hallo! "Shark Hunting in the Pacific." I know the bloke who wrote this. Is it Jack's?

ALICE. Wilfred's.

DICK (*turns*). Go on! (*Behind settee L. of her.*)

ALICE. Why not? He loves books of adventure. He reads them all.

DICK. Wilfred does?

ALICE. Yes.

DICK (*with a laugh*). Must be extremes meeting. (*Moving nearer to C. Suddenly.*) Good God!

ALICE. What's the matter?

DICK (*reads out slowly, with back to ALICE, above table L.*). "In your good times bear in mind the evil days that are in store."

ALICE. Oh, that! It's Wilfred's motto.

DICK (*over his L. shoulder*). My good woman! What on earth do you mean?

ALICE. What I say. He writes it in all his books. He started it at school.

DICK. At school! Wasn't he murdered? (*Coming down on her R. and R.C.*)

ALICE. On the contrary. He did very well at school.

DICK (*slowly, talking down R. a little*). "In your good times bear in mind the evil days . . ." (*Turns to her.*) But hang it, he's got

it wrong way round. It ought to be: "In your bad days bear in mind the *damned good* times you've *had*." That's sense.

ALICE. This is sense to Wilfred.

DICK. Is *that* what he models his life on?

ALICE. Well . . . he's certainly a *cautious* man.

DICK. Cautious you call it! Jove! (*Going up nearer table L. and throwing down book on it.*) I begin to see daylight.

ALICE. Do you, Dick?

DICK. No wonder you're tired.

ALICE. He means no harm. It's his way.

DICK. You don't say so! I'd no idea. (*Going up R. a little. Ruminating.*) It's true I never saw much of him.

ALICE (*sighs*). No one does except me.

DICK. And, of course, he was never what you'd call a (*going up stage R. to foot of piano*) sparkler. (*With a change of tone—turning to ALICE.*) See here! How long have you been married?

ALICE. Twenty-three years.

DICK. And has he always been the same?

ALICE. More or less.

DICK. Bless my soul, he ought to see a doctor. (*At piano.*)

ALICE. Why? He's perfectly happy as long as he's miserable.

DICK. But you . . . the children . . . (*Still by piano.*)

ALICE. Ah! That is a trouble. I don't mind for myself. I'm used to it. But they . . .

DICK. They don't get on with him?

ALICE. Not very well.

DICK. Ah!

ALICE. I . . . I don't like talking about it, Dick. It seems disloyal. (*Sighs.*) I smooth it over as much as I can. I'm a buffer. Perhaps that's why I'm tired.

DICK. H'm!

ALICE. You see, the children are young. Impatient. And poor dear Wilfred *will* try to boss them.

DICK (*still by piano*). Oh, but come. I'm sure *that* cuts no ice. You're not going to tell me the modern child pays any attention to its parents. Don't destroy my illusions.

ALICE. What are they to do? They're under twenty-one. They've neither of them a halfpenny. Nor have I.

DICK. No. That's true enough. (*Goes up R. towards window.*)

ALICE (*with a change of tone*). However, one thing I will *not* do, and that's lament. You'll hear all about it soon enough. You've only been home a week.

DICK. You ought to take him in hand. (*He is up at window.*) Tell him to buck up.

ALICE. One loses interest . . . in time.

(*There is a very slight pause.*)

DICK. Ah, well! S'pose there's nothing to be done. Just

another case of God bless our happy home. (*At window, his back to ALICE.*)

ALICE (*smiles*). That's it, and, after all, I have the children—they make up for everything.

(*As she speaks, JACK enters door L. He is a nice youth of nineteen. Boyishly eager. Young for his years. He comes in full of life and goes straight to his mother. JACK leaves door open.*)

(*JACK's entrance is followed by POWERS and MAID, who enter with spirit kettle and cake-stand with cake, small sandwiches and biscuits, etc.: after placing them on and near table, they exit door L.*)

JACK. Well, dearest, how goes it? (*Behind ALICE on her L., kisses her.*) Have you been good? (*Kisses her.*) I've brought you these if you have. (*Comes below settee on her L.*) Not otherwise, though; only if you've been good. (*He gives her some roses.*)

ALICE. Oh, thank you, Jack. How perfectly lovely! But you shouldn't. This time of year, too. (*Makes as if to rise.*) I must put them in water.

JACK. No, you don't. (*Putting her back.*) I'll do that. Never trust a woman with flowers. (*Crosses over to R., sees DICK up at window. Turns to DICK.*) Hallo, hallo, hallo! And how's our little Dickie bird?

DICK (*standing up at window*). Now then, young 'un! Bit more respect for your elders.

JACK. And a bit less of your young 'un, old chap. I'm nineteen. (*Puts flowers down on piano.*)

DICK. Lucky devil!

JACK (*coming down R. a little, level with ALICE. Turning to his mother*). Look at me. How have you been? How's the head?

ALICE. Pretty well.

JACK. Ear?

ALICE. It's better to-day.

JACK. Splendid! (*Comes to her on her R. Takes hold of her wrist.*) Pulse normal? (*With great gravity.*) Ah! . . . And what have you been doing since lunch?

ALICE. I've had a nice quiet time with your uncle.

JACK. That's great. (*A quick look at DICK, still up at window.*) Our male parent, needless to say, has not yet returned?

ALICE. He was kept at the office.

JACK (*sings*). "Thank God from whom . . ."

ALICE. Jack, don't be a devil.

JACK. Sorry, dearest. What I really meant was . . . (*Exaggeratedly.*) How excessively unfortunate. Now let's see. (*Goes up to piano and removes old flowers from one vase to another and arranges fresh flowers. He looks round.*) In here, I think.

ALICE. They ought to have fresh water.

JACK. I know, but they're not going to.

(Proceeds to arrange flowers, which he does very artistically.)

ALICE. That looks beautiful. Well, my boy?

— JACK. Well, what? (*Half back to her.*)

ALICE. Aren't you going to tell us?

— JACK (*tragically*). Ah!! (*Burlesque business of sobbing on piano.*)

(DICK here comes down to L. of tea-table.)

ALICE (*distressed*). Oh, Jack, you can't mean . . .

— JACK (*waving L. hand three times. Turns aside as if overcome*). Don't, don't, don't!

ALICE. Oh, dear me! I am sorry. However . . .

— JACK (*sobbing as above*). Can't be helped. We must bear up.

ALICE. That is a disappointment. But you're right, we won't lose heart.

(JACK crosses to R. of ALICE.)

Better luck next time.

— JACK (*kisses her*). You duck! It's no good, I can't keep it up. Meant to have a joke about it. (*Gets over to R.C.*) Can't be done.

ALICE. You mean you've not lost?

— JACK. Lost! Me! (*Striking an attitude R.C.*) Madam! You see before you the winner of the Vernon prize.

ALICE (*holds out her hands, he comes to her and takes them and sits on her L.*). My dearest boy! How magnificent, and I was just going to be Christian and resigned. I'm so glad I needn't.

— JACK. It is splendid, isn't it? Tell you the truth, I'm that blooming excited I don't know where I am. I'm . . . I'm fair bursting. (*Rises and dances over to R. and up above piano.*)

DICK. What's it all about? (*Comes down L. to ALICE'S R., close to table.*)

ALICE. A scholarship. The Turner school. Jack's got a talent for drawing—Heaven knows how.

— JACK. And it's fifty of the best. (*Dances down to level with DICK.*)

DICK. By Jove! Congratulations! (*DICK and JACK shake hands.*)

(DICK sits on small table R. of ALICE.)

— JACK. Thanks, my lad, thanks. Any tribute, however humble! (*Dancing down R.*)

ALICE. And I was so nervous. I hardly dared ask.

— JACK (*with superiority*). Ah! (*Stops dancing.*) There you were wrong. Now, I myself, personally, had no doubts. (*Comes to R. of DICK.*)

ALICE. Were they nice about it?

— JACK. That's the best part. Old Cockeye . . .

DICK. Cockeye? (*DICK is sitting on table L.*)

ALICE. It's all right, Dick. It's the way they talk.

— JACK (R. of DICK). He's the *judge*. Martinson, *the* Martinson. Known as Cockeye, with the "c" mute as in lollipop, because he always squints when he looks at your stuff. Like this. (*In a gruff voice.*) Yes, my boy, very pretty. Very suitable for the pavement. You must buy a pitch.

DICK. Encouraging.

— JACK. Isn't it? Well, he said, (*imitates again*). H'm! . . . the work is full of faults. The drawing is *rotten* and the painting worse; but the guts are there, my lad, the guts. Now, are you taking this seriously? I said, "Good God!" He said very well, come to my studio, Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and I'll try and teach you the rudiments of your job. Now, what d'you know about that?

DICK. Sounds all right.

— JACK. All right, quotha! (*Slapping DICK on back.*) My dear Dickie, you don't understand. You've spent too long with the locusts and honey. Martinson *never* takes a pupil. It's unique.

ALICE. Yes. Wonderful. But, Jack! Three times a week! What about . . .

— JACK. I know. I take you. What about *father*? Well . . . this puts the lid on it. If he thinks I'm going into his mouldy old office after this, he's bally well out of it, that's all.

ALICE (*clasping her head*). Oh dear, another job for your poor old mother!

— JACK (*taking ALICE's hand as he crosses to L. and sits on small chair near fireplace*). But, dearest, he'll have to give in. It's the chance of a lifetime. Good heavens, to put a budding genius like me into the sordid environment of Gracechurch Street would be like . . . like breaking a butterfly on the wheel.

DICK. Ha! Ha! God give us a good conceit of ourselves.

JACK. He has, me lad, he has.

DICK (*chuckling*). That's what I meant.

— JACK. No sarc, Dickie, if you love me. We'll get enough of that from father.

DICK. Well, it certainly sounds satisfactory.

— JACK. Satisfactory! (*Rises, crossing behind DICK to piano stool. He dances up.*) I should worry. Don't mind me being a bit potty, do you? (*Sits on stool.*) It'll wear off in time. (*He plays piano.*)

(DICK follows him and gets up below piano.)

(JILL and ROGER enter door L. JILL is in outdoor things. JILL gets to below R. and of C. settee before JACK sees her.)

(*Rises.*) My only sister! My long-lost playmate! (*He takes hold of her and waltzes her round.*)

JILL (*struggling with him*). Help! Murder! What's up? Is it rabies? (*She falls on to upper end of settee R.*)

(JACK leaves her ; waltzes up to ROGER, who is now C., and grabs hold of him.)

— JACK. Roger !

(JACK seizes ROGER and waltzes him round up L. up above tea-table and down R. to C. settee.)

ROGER (*defending himself vigorously as they waltz*). Here, get out ! Stop it. Lumme, the poor lad's balmy !

DICK. Dear ! Dear ! What it is to be young ! (*Who has been up above piano, sits on music stool.*)

— JACK (*subsides into end of settee C. ROGER is now standing on JACK'S R. behind settee C.*). Phew ! I'm quite hot.

JILL (*now sitting on settee R.*). Perhaps someone will now explain. Has a naturally weak brain collapsed, or what ?

— JACK (*panting*). Or what.

JILL. Perhaps the audience will oblige.

ALICE. He's won the prize. (*Still sitting on R. end of settee L.*) And we're all wondering what's going to happen next.

(JILL rises.)

JILL. The prize ! Not really ! (*Crosses quickly over to JACK and sits on his L. on settee C.*)

JACK. A little less astonishment would be tactful.

JILL. My dear old boy, how ripping ! (*Hugs him.*) I am glad. You know what it is, Roger ? (*Over her R. shoulder to ROGER.*)

ROGER (*still standing behind settee and R. of JACK*). Rather ! Best thing in town. Carries no end of weight. (*He smacks JACK heartily on the shoulder.*) Gratters, old chap !

JACK (*ruefully*). Thanks, awfully. That's my back when you've done with it.

JILL. The family's looking up. (*Suddenly giggles.*) Oh, Lord ! Think of father.

JACK. We have. When father says turn, we all turn. Not this journey, though.

ALICE. Now, children, listen.

(JILL rises and goes up L. to tea-table and pours out a cup of tea for ALICE.)

This has got to be managed with tact. We must do nothing in a hurry. We must talk it over.

JACK. Nothing to talk over, my love.

ALICE. What I mean is, it's important to choose the right moment.

JILL. As if there ever were one.

ALICE. There won't be if you play the fool.

(JILL brings down ALICE'S cup of tea, making a face at ROGER.)

You listen to your mother, my boy . . . (*She catches sight of JILL.*) And what are you pulling that face for, Jill? Are you in a mess, too? (*ALICE takes her tea in R. hand and passes JILL across her with her L.*)

(*JILL sits L. of ALICE on settee L.*)

JILL (*smiling at ROGER*). Are we, Roger?

ROGER (*coming down from up R. Coming forward*). . . . Mrs. Everitt!

ALICE. I knew it. Never rains but it pours. I suppose you're . . . you're——

JILL. You've hit it. We're engaged.

(*DICK rises from piano stool.*)

ALICE (*kisses JILL*). My dearest girl! How dare you!

JILL. Darling! (*JILL goes up L. round by fireplace to tea-table and pours out cup of tea for herself.*)

ROGER (*looking round, up at DICK, backing towards ALICE and then turns to her. Clears his throat in an embarrassed sort of way.*) H'm! You . . . you don't mind, Mrs. Everitt? In spite of its being unexpected——

ALICE. Ha! Ha! Unexpected!

(*DICK gets down level with R. end of settee C.*)

Really, the conceit of these infants! Because I'm over forty, it doesn't follow I'm deaf, dumb and an imbecile. (*She holds out her hand.*) My dear boy, I'm delighted.

ROGER (*going nearer to ALICE*). Thanks, most awfully.

JILL (*at tea-table*). Roger, you may kiss our mamma. She belongs to you too, now. (*Comes down with her cup and sits L. of ALICE on settee.*)

(*He does so and gets back to R.C. a little.*)

JACK (*rises and comes to back of settee L., between JILL and ALICE*). Aren't I on in this scene? No one want my blessing?

JILL (*as she kisses him*). Idiot!

(*JACK and ROGER shake hands.*)

ROGER. You'll help us, Mrs. Everitt? (*Returning to R.C. after hand-shake.*)

ALICE. Of course, but . . . Oh, Lord!

JILL. Quite. That's why we rushed it. I told Roger he must get a move on. You see, father's been so pushing lately, with his moth-eaten baronet, Sir Harry Vane, I thought we'd best settle up. We're going to tell him to-night.

JACK. And I'm going to tell him about me. What an evening we shall have! Harmony in the home. Community singing. (*JACK goes up L. and pours himself out a cup of tea.*)

JILL. He's no reason for objecting. He can't seriously expect me to marry his blessed Sir Harry.

ROGER. That'll be all right. (*Crosses over to L. of JILL and below her.*) This is my affair.

ALICE. Optimist! (*Still sitting on settee L.*)

JILL. My hero! (*L. of ALICE on settee.*)

DICK (*now above ALICE on her R. Pathetically*). I hate to seem intrusive, but is nobody going to take any notice of me?

JILL (*giving her cup to ROGER and crossing over to R. of DICK*).

(*ROGER puts cup on small table by chair down L.*)

Oh, Dickie, I'm so sorry. Just a minute, Roger, (*JILL kisses DICK*) this is our little Dickie bird. We've only had him a week, but he's beginning to sing quite nicely.

(*JACK has taken his tea over to piano.*)

ROGER (*shakes hands with him over back of settee L.*). How do you do, sir?

JILL (*R. of DICK*). Dear Uncle Dick's going to help us with father.

DICK. Oh, is he? First I've heard of it. (*DICK goes up L. to table and pours himself out a cup of tea.*)

JILL (*going up R. as DICK has moved*). You mightn't think it to look at him, but he's quite a big noise really. He gave a lecture the other night to the Geographical Society. Fetched father awfully. There was Royalty present.

(*JACK plays "It's Love that makes the World go round."*)

ROGER (*down in L. corner*). You needn't mind Jill, sir. I'll soon lick her into shape when we're married.

(*JILL crosses quickly over to ROGER and pinches him.*)

Ow!

JILL. That'll learn you to give lip. Begin as you mean to go on's my motto. (*Now on ROGER'S L. and a little above him—down L.*)

ALICE. Children, children, you're going too fast.

DICK (*crossing from table over to below piano with cup*). And I, who came home for peace and quiet, I seem to have landed in a whirlpool.

ALICE. Family life, Dick. You'll soon get used to it.

JILL (*at settee L. of ALICE. In a sepulchral voice*). I suppose he's not home yet?

ALICE. Your father has been kept at the office.

JILL. Good old office!

ALICE. But he'll be here presently, so you'd best pull yourselves together. It's nearly dinner-time.

DICK (*looks at his watch. Leaves cup on piano.*) Jove, so it is. I must be getting along. (*Going R. a little as he looks at watch.*)

ALICE. Oh, Dick, won't you stop?

DICK. Shan't I be *de trop*? (*Going towards L.*) Looks like your busy day.

JILL (*going behind settee L. and meeting DICK and pushing him nearer C. Puts her arm through his.*) Not at all. The more the merrier. Don't go, Dickie. We want your immoral support.

(*ROGER is still L. JACK still playing "It's Love that makes the World go round."*)

DICK (*hesitating*), Well . . . (R.C.)

ALICE. I think it might be a good thing.

DICK. Right you are, then. (*Crosses in front of JILL to L.*) I'll hop across and dress.

ALICE. Oh, don't bother to dress.

JILL. But, mother, think! So undignified to dine undressed.

(*JILL then goes up behind DICK and opens door L.*)

ALICE. Well! (*Sighs.*) Perhaps you're right.

DICK. Good. Then I'll stroll along. Back presently.

(*He goes out. JILL closes door.*)

ROGER (*a shade nervously*). Hadn't I better go, too? (*Crossing ALICE and going up C.*)

JILL (*comes to him on his L. and stops him*). Oh, no, you don't! We're one flesh now. You're going to see this through.

ROGER. But I'm not dressed either.

JILL. Doesn't matter about you. You're for it, anyhow. May as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb.

ROGER. Yes, but you see your father stopped at the office this afternoon, and I didn't. I went off with you. And after all, I am his secretary. If he sees me here, it'll remind him.

JILL. Can't be helped. In for a penny, in for a pound.

|| (*JACK plays forte.*)

— JACK (*fatuously*). "Oh, it's Love that makes the World go round." (*At the piano and strums in a desultory way throughout the following.*)

ROGER. Well, if you think so. (R.C. near front of settee C.)

(*Segue into "Love that," etc.*)

JILL (L. of ROGER). I'm sure of it. What's wanted in this house is an earthquake.

|| (*JACK plays chords in bass.*)

Been wanted for years. Now it's coming.

(*POWERS enters door L. At POWERS' entrance, JILL sits on settee C.L. end. ROGER stands on JACK'S L. near piano.*)

POWERS. Excuse me, madam. (*Comes to R. of ALICE behind settee L.*)

ALICE. Yes, Powers?

POWERS. There's a person called to see you, madam. A Mrs.

Maunders. (*It is called "Marnders" throughout the piece.*)

ALICE. Oh! What sort of a person?

POWERS. I think she's been drinking, madam.

ALICE. You mean a beggar?

POWERS. Couldn't say, madam. She asked to see you alone. I told her you had visitors, so she said she'd call again.

ALICE. Did she say what she wanted?

POWERS. No, madam.

ALICE. Oh, very well. Let me know if she comes back.

POWERS. Yes, madam.

(*She goes out.*)

ALICE. I wonder who it was.

JILL (*comes to L. of ALICE behind settee L. Nestles up to her*). One of your old women, darling. You spoil them, mother. You spoil everybody.

ALICE. I know. It's my Christian disposition.

JILL (*affectionately*). How have you been this afternoon? These bounders have been making such an infernal row I've not had a chance of asking. How's the head?

ALICE. It *did* ache a little . . . but it's *going* to ache a lot.

JILL. No, it isn't. Whatever happens, *you're* not to worry. I won't have it. *We'll* tackle him. It'll be perfectly all right, won't it, Roger?

ROGER (*coming down from piano to R.C.*). Of course it will. Nothing to bother about, Mrs. Everitt.

(*Piano stops. Silence. A door bangs off L. All look at door. JILL looks round at JACK, and then crosses tiptoes to door and opens it. WILFRED'S voice is heard.*)

JACK (*still at the piano*). There's our little sunbeam. "Thank God from whom . . ." (*on piano*).

ALICE (*worried*). Jack, I do wish you wouldn't.

JACK. Better have a bit of music. Buck him up. (*Four bars "Dead March." He begins to play the "Dead March in Saul."*)

ALICE. My boy, do be careful.

(*They all listen.*)

JILL (*listening at door L.*). It's father all right. I can hear him groaning. (*Coming over to R.*)

JACK. The moping owl doth to the moon complain.

(*JACK plays "It's Love that makes," etc.*)

JILL. Oh, chuck it, Jack! (*JILL gets up R. to window.*)

(JACK takes no notice and goes on. There is a moment's pause, then WILFRED enters. JACK continues playing, but more quietly. WILFRED is a big, clean-shaven man of about fifty. He is fat and flabby, with a large stomach. His complexion is pasty, and the expression round his mouth is peevish. Otherwise he is not ill-looking, but is what would be called a fine figure of a man. He is dressed in a pepper-and-salt morning suit very well cut and wears a black tie. He carries a leather dispatch-case. He comes to ALICE on her L. and above settee and kisses her hand ceremoniously.)

WILFRED. Good evening, my love. How are you?

ALICE. Well, Wilfred.

(His voice is complaining and querulous. He does not wait for an answer, but goes straight to settee C., deposits his dispatch-case. Comes down C., turns and sees ROGER, who is now over R. by settee.)

WILFRED. You there, Elrington? I missed you this afternoon.

ROGER. Sorry, sir. I didn't think you'd want me, as it's Saturday.

WILFRED (resigned). Oh, it's all right. I didn't expect you to stop. (Going up stage R.) Don't play, Jack. You know I dislike modern music.

— JACK (cheerfully). Sorry, guv'nor. (JACK stops playing. He bangs down the lid of the piano.)

WILFRED (up R. at window. Draws in his breath between his teeth). My dear lad, my head!

ALICE (sympathetically). Does it ache, darling?

WILFRED (aggrieved. Coming down C.). It always aches. You know it does.

ALICE. You'll be better when you've had your dinner, Wilfred.

WILFRED (turns to her). I don't think so. It's been a terrible day. (Comes up to dispatch-case.)

JILL (cheerfully). Has it? Why? (She has worked round from window to down L. of tea-table and meets WILFRED on his L. near settee C.)

WILFRED (glaring at her). Oh, never mind., You wouldn't understand.

JILL. Why not? I'm not imbecile.

ALICE (from settee L. In a whisper). Jill, shut up!

(JILL gets round up L. above table and then down R. to ROGER.)

— JACK (brightly). Thought you weren't quite yourself, guv'nor. Anything wrong with the Knighthood?

WILFRED. The Knighthood has nothing to do with it. I never think about it. (Bus. with dispatch-case.)

JILL (she has by now got to ROGER and they are both behind settee R. Sotto voce to ROGER). That's what it is. It's gone wrong.

— JACK. Well, what's the trouble, then? Panic in the City?

WILFRED (*throwing dispatch-case on settee*). Oh, it doesn't matter. We won't talk about it. I'm sure *I* don't want to bore anyone. (*Comes down and then turns to ROGER.*) Are you staying to dinner, Elrington?

ROGER. Oh . . . er . . . Very good of you, sir.

(JILL sits top end of settee R.)

WILFRED. May as well, as you are here. (*Goes up R. to window and round tea-table down to L. of C. settee.*) We can do some work. I shall be at it all night.

ROGER. Anything special, sir?

WILFRED. Lots of things. The Rosenheim case. (*Comes down L. to C.*)

ROGER. Oh, has that old skinflint turned up again?

WILFRED (C.). Please remember he's a rich man, Elrington. He deserves respect.

ALICE (*gets up suddenly and speaks in a depressed way*). Yes. Well, I think I'll go and dress. (*Goes up L. round by fireplace to door L.*)

WILFRED (*going up behind settee L. to open door*). Tell them to put dinner back a quarter of an hour, will you? I couldn't eat now. I must get calm.

ALICE. Yes, dear.

(*She goes out.*)

WILFRED. I've had no lunch again. (*Goes to tea-table, finds tea all gone, but takes a biscuit.*)

JILL. But how silly of you, father; why not?

ROGER. You should have sent out for something, sir.

WILFRED. How can I think of these things with all I have on my mind?

JILL. That's no reason for not eating.

WILFRED. It's of no consequence. Has anyone seen the paper? (*Comes down C.*)

ROGER. It's here, sir. (*Takes "Evening Standard" from pocket and hands it to WILFRED.*)

WILFRED (*takes it up and goes to settee L. and turns it over hastily*). No reply from Germany, of course. Disgraceful! Everything going down. Unemployment increasing. (*He throws it down and goes up L. round settee L.*)

ROGER (*picking up paper from floor*). Perhaps there's something in the stop press. (*He looks.*)

WILFRED (*pausing by him*). Well? Is there? (*Above L. and of settee L.*)

ROGER. Only . . . football results. (*Gets to L. corner.*)

WILFRED (*throwing up his arms*). Football results! Football results! And the country going to the dogs. (*Gets round behind settee L. to C.*)

ROGER. Hallo! (*Down L.*)

WILFRED. What is it? (*C.*)

ROGER. There's something about you, sir. A paragraph.

(*JILL is seated on settee R. JACK standing near and above her.*)

WILFRED. About me? Where? (*Comes near to ROGER'S R.*)

ROGER. The Knighthood. You're in the list. They say it's certain.

WILFRED (*down C. Reading*). H'm! . . . H'm! . . . Scandalous the way the Press makes free with the names of private citizens. Not official, of course. Probably incorrect. (*His manner changes slightly.*) I'll keep it. (*He tears out the page and puts it carefully into his dispatch-case on settee C.*) Now, Elrington, you'd better take this into the library and look through it before dinner. Then we can start directly afterwards.

ROGER. Very good, sir. (*Goes up to WILFRED. He takes dispatch-case and crosses over towards library door, squeezes JILL'S hand as he passes her.*)

(*Goes out.*)

JILL (*crosses at hand-shake with ROGER, up to R. end of C. settee*). What's it say about the Knighthood, father? Is it all right?

WILFRED (*after giving ROGER the dispatch-case, he has gone up to take a biscuit. He gradually becomes more pompous*). Nothing of importance. I hardly read it. By the by, Jack, (*comes down to JACK, who is at settee R.*) I want you to come to the office on Monday. No use idling your time away here. The business will be yours when I die, so you'd better get used to it at once. (*He goes towards the door and opens it.*)

(*JACK and JILL pull faces at each other. JILL is sitting on R. settee. She signs to him vigorously to speak.*)

JACK (*blurts out*). Father! (*Over R.*)

WILFRED (*turns*). Yes? What is it? (*Looking at watch.*) It's getting late. (*Going L.*)

JACK. I want to speak to you. (*WILFRED turns.*) We've got to have it out some time, so we may as well now. (*WILFRED shuts door L.*) I'm not going to the office.

WILFRED (*blandly*). I've no time to listen to nonsense, my boy. (*Going again L.*)

JACK (*coming over to table near settee L.*). It's not nonsense. I mean it. I've won the Vernon prize to-day and Martinson says it's my duty to go in for art. He's taking me as a pupil.

WILFRED. Oh! (*Coming down to settee L. JACK retreats to R.*) And may I ask on what you propose to live?

JACK (*looks at JILL and retreats awkwardly*). I supposed . . . I supposed you'd make me a small allowance until I begin to earn. I shan't want much.

WILFRED (*coming c.*). And what about the business? You're my son, it falls to you to take on my *responsibilities*.

(JILL gets down L. behind settee to front of it. Collapses on settee.)

— JACK. I'm sorry, father, but I've responsibilities of my own.

WILFRED. Responsibilities, and no income? Absurd!

— JACK. I'm going to do the thing I can. Not waste time on something I hate.

WILFRED. Very well, my boy; it's in your own hands. As long as you can support yourself. (*Going L. a little.*)

JACK. You *know* I can't unless you help me. (*Stamps foot.*)

WILFRED (*returning to c.*). Exactly. As far as I can see, that settles it. Your place is with me. People in our position have their duties.

JACK. I don't see where the duty comes in. It's only a money-making concern when all's said and done. You can afford to let me do what I like.

WILFRED. We won't argue. I've nothing more to say. Now, children, it's time to dress. (*He goes again to the door and opens it.*)

JACK (*in a whisper to JILL*). Go on. You have a shot now.

JILL (*rises from c. settee and comes down in front of settee L. facing WILFRED and back to audience*). Just a minute, father. I want to speak to you, too.

WILFRED. You, Jill? (*Closes door.*) Well . . . and what can I do for you? (*Comes c. again.*)

JILL. I'm engaged to Roger. (*Turning R. to him.*)

WILFRED. Oh! And who may Roger be? (c.)

JILL (*below settee L.*). Don't be absurd, father. As if you didn't know! *Roger Elrington*. It happened this afternoon. I know you won't approve, because you want me to marry Sir Harry Vane. Well, I'm not going to, so we'd better face facts, hadn't we? (*Comes up to table near settee and bangs it.*)

WILFRED (c., *majestically*). Do you think your manner is likely to influence me in your favour, Jill?

JILL (*retreating L. a little*). I'm sorry, father. I don't *want* to be rude, but you *do* ask for it. You crab everything so.

WILFRED. Crab everything? (c.)

JILL. What's wrong with Roger?

WILFRED (c.). Roger Elrington is, as far as I know, a very worthy young man. It does not follow that I desire him as a husband for my daughter.

JILL. Strikes me it's what I desire that matters.

WILFRED. My dear Jill, I am fully aware of the selfishness of the present generation . . .

JILL (*still below settee L.*). Selfish! Because I want to choose my own husband?

WILFRED (*continuing*). And I decline to be rushed in this manner. When one is contemplating a change there are always two questions

one should ask. *One*: Is this change necessary? *Two*: If so, is it necessary now? I have gone through life on that principle.

JILL (*coming nearer to him and in front of table near settee L. Dimppling prettily at him*). Very well. All I have to say to that is, the answer to both questions is in the affirmative.

WILFRED. You forget that I have to answer them too, and that my answer is in the negative. (*Turns up and goes towards door L.*)

JILL. But why? Why? Why? (*Following him round to below C. settee.*)

WILFRED. I do not consider Roger Elrington a suitable match considering the position of my family.

JILL. You mean that blessed knighthood?

WILFRED (*comes to above settee L.*). The knighthood, though unimportant in itself, is nevertheless a sign that His Majesty's Government attaches importance to my services.

JACK (*over R. still. Mutters*). And subscriptions.

WILFRED (*half hearing*). I beg your pardon, Jack?

JACK (*with great innocence*). Nothing, father.

WILFRED. I have always done my duty whatever the cost to others. (*Laugh.*) I do not propose to change now. (*Going L. again.*)

JILL. Very well, then; we shall have to act accordingly. I told you because it seemed fairer. I shall not give Roger up, and that's all there is to it.

WILFRED. You must please yourself, my dear child, and so must Jack. It would inconvenience me to part with Roger.

JILL. Oh, father, you wouldn't . . .

WILFRED. My dear daughter, you both apparently claim the right to act as you think fit. In return, you must really allow me the liberty to conduct my own business as I choose.

JILL (*hotly*). Well, I think it's perfectly . . .

(*At ALICE'S entrance, JILL gets over to settee R. and sits. JACK sits on settee C.*)

(*She breaks off as ALICE enters quickly in evening dress. She has obviously hurried and is putting the finishing touches as she comes in. She looks uneasily from one to the other.*)

ALICE (*coming down to L. end of settee L.*). Isn't anyone going to change? Dinner will be ready directly.

WILFRED. Going, my love, going. Children, pray make haste. I dislike unpunctuality.

(*He goes out door L.*)

ALICE (*goes up to door at his exit and closes it. Then comes down L.C. above settee L.*). Now, what's happened? I was as quick as I could because I knew you'd be making a mess of it.

JILL. We've broken it to him. (*Is now sitting lower end of settee R. back to audience.*)

JACK. Both of us. (*Seated on R. end of settee c. half back to audience.*)

JILL. And the fat . . .

JACK (*imitating his father*). We need hardly say, is in the fire. Some fire.

JILL. And some fat !

ALICE. Children, children (*crosses over to JILL and sits above her on settee R.*), children, and I told you not to hurry. You'll be the death of me.

JILL. If it hadn't been for that beastly paragraph in the paper about the knighthood, we might have had a *chance*. He was so nice and *depressed* when he came home, because something had gone wrong with it.

JACK. Yes, and then he discovered it was going to come off, and up went the dignity. 'Pon me soul, it's comic ! (*Rises and goes up R. to window, then down above tea-table, down L. to front of settee L.*)

ALICE (*rather helplessly*). Oh dear . . . you know, children, I really can't have you speaking like this about your father.

JILL. Bless you, darling, that's nothing to what we say behind your back. We don't say much to your face so as to spare your feelings.

(*JACK has now got to front of settee L.*)

ALICE. It's not right and . . . and, besides, it only makes things more difficult.

JACK (*coming from settee L. to L.C.*). Dearest . . . I love you when you do the heavy mother. As if you didn't know he's hopeless. (*Curiously.*) I do wish you'd tell me why you married him, mother. I've often wondered.

ALICE. Yes, I'll spank you in a minute, me lad !

JACK. We could have had such fun if there'd only been the three of us. (*Rises and goes up stage.*)

JILL. Fathead ! Don't you see we shouldn't have been here at all if she hadn't ? (*Still seated below ALICE on settee R.*)

JACK. Oh ! . . . oh . . . oh . . . no, so we shouldn't.

ALICE (*rises from settee R.*). Yes. Well, I refuse to join in a pathological discussion. As to your father, I've told you a thousand times all he needs is humouring.

(*They are now one on each side of her, patting her.*)

JILL (*R. of ALICE*). But, darling, we've tried, and the more you give in the more he wants. It's not that we're caddish, either of us. We'd do anything in the world for *you*, wouldn't we, Jack ?

JACK (*L. of ALICE*). Yep.

ALICE (*C.*). I know. I know.

JILL. But when it comes to simply posing in the background as the fruit of his loins—

JACK (*backing to front of settee L., hands to face as if shocked, he sits*).
Oh, the indelicacy!

JILL. Well, it's a waste of time. You must see *that*, mother.

ALICE. I prefer to see nothing—it's easier.

JILL. The plain truth is, it's a jolly good thing this has happened. It was bound to sooner or later, and it's a crisis. We'll all feel better when it's over.

ALICE. I hope so, but I don't quite see how . . .

(POWERS enters L. door.)

POWERS. If you please, madam, that there Mrs. Maunders is here again.

ALICE. Oh . . . oh, yes. The person you told me about.

POWERS. Yes, madam.

ALICE. Very well. I'll see her for five minutes.

POWERS. Very good, madam. (*Leaves door open. She goes out door L.*)

(JACK rises.)

ALICE. Now, children, you must go. (*She puts JACK and JILL across her up stage.*) You'll be late, and your father won't like it.

(JACK goes to door first and holds it for JILL.)

JILL. Of course he won't. Against his principles to like anything. Come on, Jack. (*She goes out door L.*)

JACK. Right you are. (*Comes to ALICE on her R. Kisses his mother.*) Don't look so worried, dearest. All you've got to do is to keep in the background. You're not on in this scene. Takes a strong man to cope with that husband of yours. Bye-bye, I won't be late. (*He follows JILL door L.*)

(*There is a slight pause. ALICE goes slowly up stage R. near piano—shakes her head and sighs. Then POWERS shows in MRS. MAUNDERS. She is an elderly woman, very thin and shabbily dressed. She has the remains of good looks. It is apparent that she has had a drink or two.*)

POWERS. Mrs. Maunders.

(*She goes out door L.*)

MRS. MAUNDERS. Good evening. (*Has got to just above settee L.*)

ALICE. Good evening. Won't you sit down? (*Indicating settee L.*)

MRS. MAUNDERS. Thanks. (*Comes down L. to front of settee and sits at R. end of it.*)

ALICE. You wished to see me? (*Comes down level with her.*)

MRS. MAUNDERS. Yes, Mrs. Everitt, I did. I wanted to speak to you first.

ALICE. First? (*Coming down a little to c.*)

MRS. MAUNDERS. Between ourselves, like.

ALICE. Is there anything I can do for you?

MRS. MAUNDERS. Well, there is and there isn't.

ALICE. I haven't very much time. Perhaps you'll tell me. (c.)

MRS. MAUNDERS. I presoom you're not aware who I am?

ALICE. Don't you come from the Provident Society? I'm on the Committee. I imagined they sent you to me for help.

MRS. MAUNDERS. Oh dear, no. Certainly not. Nothing of that sort. Poor I may be, but I'm as proud as here and there a one.

ALICE. Then I'm afraid I don't know. (*Going to R. settee and sitting.*) Perhaps you'll explain?

MRS. MAUNDERS. I'm a friend of your husband's.

ALICE. My husband's?

MRS. MAUNDERS. Ah . . . I see you haven't heard. He hasn't told you. No, he wouldn't; not Willie.

ALICE (*starts*). Willie?

MRS. MAUNDERS. When I—when I say I'm a friend, it's a little time ago now. When he was at Oxford.

ALICE (*looking at her in amazement*). At Oxford?

MRS. MAUNDERS. I was in business. 'Baconist's. All the young men used to deal there. Your husband wasn't the only one; I could have married time and again.

ALICE. I'm afraid I don't quite fol—

MRS. MAUNDERS. Ah! but I was different then. Little bit of Dresden China my second husband called me. Two husbands I've had. Lost them both through no fault of my own. My second left me a houseful of furniture and that's all I've got.

ALICE (*quite bewildered*). Yes, but what on earth . . .

MRS. MAUNDERS. Not been easy as you can imagine. Camberwell I live. Let apartments. But what with rates and taxes and the price of food, there's not much to it.

ALICE. One moment, Mrs. Maunders—(*rises from settee R.*)—*please*. I don't understand. (*Advances to c.*) Why do you tell me this? (*Advances to c.*) What's it got to do with me?

MRS. MAUNDERS. Because of my daughter.

ALICE. Your daughter? (c.)

MRS. MAUNDERS. Your husband's my daughter's father.

ALICE. What! (*A step back.*)

MRS. MAUNDERS. You'll excuse me mentioning it so abruptly, but I always say if you've got to have a tooth out . . .

ALICE. Your daughter! . . . my husband! (*Moves towards bell.*) I don't believe it. (*Moves to fireplace, crossing MRS. MAUNDERS.*) I shall be glad if you'll go.

MRS. MAUNDERS. I'll go, Mrs. Everitt, when I've finished. I've not come here without good reason, and I've not come here without proofs given. (*She fumbles in a shabby bag, and produces some papers.*) Perhaps you'll kindly cast your eye over those.

ALICE (*hesitates, then takes them in spite of herself and glances at them. She starts*). Oh, my God! (*Down L.*)

MRS. MAUNDERS. And that's not all. I've letters at home, both from him and his lawyers, when he settled with me.

ALICE. Settled with you?

MRS. MAUNDERS. Oh, yes, he settled all right! Mark you, I've nothing against Willie. He did the straight thing. Offered me an annuity or a lump sum down on condition he never heard from me again.

ALICE. Well, in that case——

MRS. MAUNDERS. My first husband and me we talked it over.

ALICE. You were married, when this happened?

MRS. MAUNDERS. Engaged, and as I say we talked it over, and we decided on the lump sum down. And I've kept my word. From that day to this, I've never asked Willie for a ha'penny.

ALICE. Then what have you come for now? (*Giving back papers to MRS. MAUNDERS.*)

MRS. MAUNDERS. Because things have altered. My daughter's twenty-seven and out of work. She worked at Mixon's glass department. Earned good money till they failed.

ALICE. Well?

MRS. MAUNDERS. And seeing how well your husband is doin', goin' to be made a knight, goin' into Parliament, thousand here . . . thousand there . . . I thought it only fair he should do something for one he used to be fond of long ago.

ALICE. But why do you come to me?

MRS. MAUNDERS. Because you've a kind heart. Oh, I've made inquiries. I know. Spend a mint on charity. (*Wheedling.*) I thought you might influence him.

ALICE. Did you, indeed? Well, I'm extremely sorry, but it's too much to ask. You must see my husband yourself. (*Rings bell near fireplace and then crosses over to c., crossing in front of MRS. MAUNDERS.*)

MRS. MAUNDERS. Thought p'raps you'd like to speak to him first.

ALICE. Not at all, thank you. (*Going up stage R. a little.*)

MRS. MAUNDERS. You see, it's such a long time since we met. (*Curiously.*) What's he like these days? Used to be on the starchy side.

ALICE (*turning R. to MRS. MAUNDERS, half back to audience*). Really, Mrs. Maunders, you can't imagine for one moment I'm going to discuss my husband with you. If you . . . if you want to see him it's your own affair entirely, and you must . . . you must make an appointment.

MRS. MAUNDERS. Right-o! What about to-night?

ALICE. He's . . . he's busy to-night.

MRS. MAUNDERS. Well, and aren't I busy? (*Rises and goes c.*) Goodness gracious me! Who's Willie, when all's said and done? Not the Archbishop of Canterbury, I presume?

ALICE. You mustn't talk to me like that, Mrs. Maunders . . . I . . . I'm not used to it. I've nothing to do with it at all, and I shall be glad if you'll go.

MRS. MAUNDERS. Well, I'm going to see him somehow and that's flat. (*Up to her a little.*)

ALICE (*at lower end of piano*). If you . . . if you care to come back in . . . in about an hour and a half, I'll tell my husband . . . not what your business is, of course. That's your affair, but . . . I'll tell him you're there.

MRS. MAUNDERS. Right you are. That'll suit me fine. (*Going behind settee to door L.*) As woman to woman fair treatment's all I ask.

(*DICK comes in, in evening dress.*)

DICK. Hallo! Engaged? I'll go into the library. (*Comes down L. to below settee L. and stands there.*)

ALICE. No, no. It's quite all right. We've finished.

DICK. I came to tell you dinner's ready. Wilfred's gone down.

ALICE. Th . . . thank you. (*She turns to MRS. MAUNDERS.*) Then that's all, isn't it?

MRS. MAUNDERS. Certainly, Mrs. Everitt. Much obliged, I'm sure. Don't think *I* want to make trouble in the home. Not my way. Never has been.

(*POWERS enters in response to bell and now waits at door L. above it to show MRS. MAUNDERS out.*)

But right's right all the world over, and you can't get away from it.

(*POWERS has opened door.*)

I'll wish you au revoir.

(*Goes out, followed by POWERS.*)

DICK. And who is your friend the duchess? Seemed annoyed. (*Crosses over to R. before speaking—sits on settee R.*)

ALICE. Dick, do you know what that woman says? (*Going up stage L., not looking at DICK.*)

DICK. No. What?

ALICE. She says she knew Wilfred at Oxford. (*Above tea-table now.*)

DICK. Really! How very earth-shaking! What about it?

ALICE (*with meaning*). Intimately. (*At window, R. side of it.*)

DICK. Intimately? (*Stares at her.*) Good God, you don't mean . . .

ALICE (*comes down to DICK*). Yes, I do. She says Wilfred's the father of her daughter.

DICK. What!!!

ALICE. For goodness' sake, don't shout like that. He'll hear you.

DICK. Wilfred! . . . the father! . . . *Her* daughter.

ALICE. She has photographs . . . letters . . .

DICK. B-but it's impossible.

ALICE. She proved it.

DICK. But when did it happen?

ALICE. Twenty-nine years ago, when he was up.

DICK. When he was . . . Well, I'm damned!

(There is a pause—ALICE gets near table L.)

What did she come for? Money?

ALICE. Yes.

DICK. What did you say?

ALICE. I told her it had nothing to do with me and she must see Wilfred. *(At table L.)*

DICK. Quite right. Good heavens! Who would have thought, who would have thought, that Wilfred—

(He breaks off and there is a moment's pause, then he goes to her and puts his arms round her.)

Poor old girl, how awful for you! I am sorry. What a shock it must have been! Here—sit down.

ALICE. I don't want to sit down. I want to stand—I'm thinking. *(Crosses DICK to R. slowly.)*

DICK. Don't think—bad for you—take time. (c.)

ALICE. Don't be silly, Dick. Look here, I can't come down to dinner. I must be alone. *(Below DICK down R.)*

DICK. Quite, quite! Most natural. I'll send you up some soup.

ALICE. Soup! I don't want soup. I want all there is; I'm hungry. *(Crosses him to L. below settee L.)*

DICK. Hungry?

ALICE. Good gracious, man, why not? I'm not ill. Don't be so bedsidy. *(Goes up stage L. above settee L. to C.)*

DICK *(rather shocked)*. My dear!

ALICE. Only they must send it from the kitchen. I don't want Wilfred to know. You must tell him—*(sits C. settee)* I'm—I'm—I'm suffering. . . . Why, it's the most cheering thing that's happened for years.

DICK. Cheering? *(He has got up stage R. and is close to ALICE on her R.)*

ALICE. I should think so. Oh, Dick, *(her hand on his L. arm)* I didn't tell you when you asked me for fear of upsetting you, but I have been unhappy—very. I've only stuck it because of the children. *(Half tearfully.)* You don't know the state I'd got into. I'd lost my spirits. I'd lost my sense of humour. . . . He'd squashed me. But this *(rises—throwing up her arms)* is a breath of air. This is human. This is a way out. *(She goes to door, then turns.)* I'll have a pint of champagne with my dinner, Jack.

DICK. Good God!

QUICK CURTAIN.



ACT II

SCENE.—*The Library. There are two doors, one leading to the landing and one to the drawing-room. It is after dinner on the same evening. The Curtains are closed.*

(ROGER is sitting at a large desk R. He is busy arranging papers.
JILL comes in at double doors L.)

JILL (gets L.C.). Hullo, old thing!

ROGER (jumping up). Jill! (Comes round below desk.)

JILL. Enter the dewy English girl, all blushes and confusion.

ROGER. So I notice. I'll have five bob each way on the confusion. (He goes towards her as if about to kiss her.)

JILL. No, you mustn't. (Crosses to settee R. and sits lower end.) I'm not going to stop. I just came to put you wise. Things are happening.

ROGER. Happening? (Sitting on upper end of settee L. of her.)

JILL. You may have noticed that the atmosphere was slightly strained at dinner.

ROGER (makes a movement as if to kiss her). Well . . .

JILL. Don't. We must restrain ourselves. This is no time for idle dalliance. (Dramatically.) Roger, the crash approaches.

ROGER (starts). You mean your father's coming. (Looks round at door L.)

JILL. Oh, no. He'll be a little while yet. I left him reading his Bible.

ROGER. His Bible?

JILL. The "Financial News." It's a wonderful sight. He's sitting there all alone, with a glass of port, and a calm air of aloof detachment as if he were something on a pedestal.

ROGER. Ha! Ha!

JILL. It's no laughing matter. Fact is the offensive has started. Jack and I went over the top before dinner.

ROGER. The devil you did!

JILL. And we're both casualties.

ROGER. Was he wild?

JILL. Not wild. He's never wild. But he was extremely dignified.

ROGER. Crikey!

JILL. And, needless to say, he's not taking any.

ROGER. H'm! . . . I was afraid of that. (*Rises and comes down L. a little.*) What's the next move?

JILL (*puts cushion at upper end of settee and sits there with her legs on lower end*). Well, we can do one of two things. We can either (*with a gesture*) part for ever . . .

ROGER. What tripe!

JILL. My own! I love you when you're romantic.

(*ROGER goes to her and kneels by her side.*)

The young girl, despair in her heart, suggests giving her lover up, and he replies briefly and nobly with the one word Tripe! (*With great emotion.*) Oh, darling! *Not* with onions, I hope.

ROGER. Don't be an ass, Jill. You know what I mean. (*Rises.*) I'm not going to let you go, and there's an end of it.

JILL. Cave-man!

ROGER. And, anyhow, what's his objection? It's not as if I were penniless. I've two hundred in the bank at the present moment . . . saved.

JILL. I, on the contrary, am in debt. That's what's so rotten about father. He won't part.

ROGER. You mean he's stingy?

JILL. Not stingy exactly. We've everything we want, except cash.

ROGER. You have an allowance, I suppose? (*Standing level with her.*)

JILL. Good Lord, no. If he gave us an allowance we should be independent and that wouldn't suit.

ROGER. How very antediluvian!

JILL. It's awful. Mother ought to have struck years ago. She's such a dear.

ROGER. She is, indeed.

JILL. He's reduced her to a perfect rag—health and everything.

ROGER. You don't mean he's nasty to her?

JILL. Oh, no. Just dull.

ROGER. Dull?

JILL. And selfish.

ROGER. Lord! And I always thought you such a united family.

JILL. We are, except for him. I say, Roger . . .

ROGER. Well?

JILL. Do you think it very beastly of me to run father down like this?

ROGER (*uncomfortably*). Oh! . . . I don't know. (*Crosses below desk to chair.*) It's . . . it's difficult for me to judge.

JILL. I believe you do. But, then, you see, you've never lived with him. You don't know what it's like. I'm not *naturally* spiteful, Roger. Not really.

ROGER (*affectionately*). Of course you aren't. (*Over back of settee.*)

JILL. But I defy anyone not to let fly about father. It's more than flesh and blood can bear.

ROGER. I understand, old thing. What's your mother say about all this business?

JILL. D'you know there's another queer thing. (*She motions ROGER to sit lower end of settee and he does so.*) There's something going on in this house that I've not fathomed.

ROGER. Oh! (*Sits back and folds arms.*)

JILL. Mother was quite all right when Jack and I went to dress. Then she suddenly sent word she was too ill to come down to dinner, and then I met her dinner going up to her room, with a *pint of champagne on the tray*.

ROGER. By Jove!

JILL. Well, you know, it's a rum sort of illness, that is! I'm going to tackle her presently.

(*At JACK'S entrance JILL jumps up and gets to settee C. ROGER rises and stands near lower end of settee.*)

(*JACK comes in door up stage L. and bangs the door. They both jump and turn. JACK has his hat and coat on and carries a suit-case.*)

Good gracious, how you startled me! Hallo! Going away?

JACK (*L. above arm-chair and level with JILL*). I'm more than going away. I'm departing into the cold, cold night. For keeps.

JILL. You're not!

JACK (*burlesque sobbing on JILL'S shoulder, bag in hand*). And I've come to bid you a fond farewell.

JILL. Where are you going to?

JACK. I'm going . . . (*crosses JILL to ROGER*) by the way; I suppose Roger has been told the ins and outs of this little love-nest?

JILL. Of course. (*Comes down to arm-chair R. of table L.*)

JACK (*C.*). I'm going to dig with Bob Stowell in Chelsea. (*Puts bag above arm-chair.*) I 'phoned him. Explained the rift within the lute, and told him I was coming. He's awfully bucked.

(*ROGER comes nearer to them.*)

JILL. I see. It's a low question, but what are you going to live on?

JACK. Well . . . I shall have my fifty quid to start with, and then mother . . .

JILL. But she's nothing either, poor dear. I mean nothing worth while.

JACK. She's given me her diamond pendant. (*Pulls it out.*) Look!

JILL (*taking case, opening it and looking at it by light of lamp on table*). What! Father's best present!

JACK. Yes. I shall spend the fifty quid, and then I shall spout

this. Ought to get a hundred on it easily. I worked it all out with Bob. He's only that one large room. Does his own cooking. Bloaters mostly. We can easily live on thirty bob a week. Tell you it's great.

JILL. But, look here, when did you see mother?

JACK (*sits on arm of JILL's chair*). Just now. She sent for me. She was sitting alone in her room drinking fizz. 'Course I hate taking the pendant, but she forced me, and when I'm through with this, there are the pearls and ear-rings to go at.

JILL (*rises and stands by chair*). Just a minute, my child. Where do I come in?

JACK. You don't. You stop outside. Besides, you two couldn't set up house on a pendant, anyhow. (*Picks up bag and goes up to door L.*) Worst of it is leaving mother. Seems such a dirty trick. But it was her own idea. And she's coming to see us to-morrow. You'd better come too, and Roger. We'll have a beanfeast and celebrate the new life—eh, what?

ROGER (*gets up to JACK on his R.*). But look here. Aren't you rather rushing it? Wouldn't it be better to try and talk your father round?

JACK (*looks at JILL*). Talk him round!

JILL. Father! (*Sitting on arm of chair L.*)

JACK. Talk father round? Talk the Monument round! You'd have a better chance. (*Listens and starts.*) Lord! I believe that's him. I'm off. Bye-bye, old thing. Cheerio and keep that schoolgirl complexion, won't you? (*He goes towards door.*)

JILL (*calls after him*). I say, Jack! (*R. of door.*)

JACK (*turning*). What?

JILL. I'm glad you've left the fender.

JACK. Oh, that's all right. I'm coming for that next week. And the piano.

(*He goes out door up L. to L.*)

JILL (*closes door and leans with back to it—giggling delightedly*). Oh, isn't it all too lovely! Things are moving at last.

ROGER. They are, indeed. (*Sits on settee C.*) I'm just wondering if I hadn't better do the same.

JILL. Gracious heavens, no! Much better have it all out at once. (*Gets to settee L. of ROGER.*)

(*ALICE enters double doors L. There is a curious air of repressed excitement about her.*)

(*Surprised, going to ALICE.*) Mother darling! Are you better? Do you think you ought to come down?

ALICE. Shut up, Jill. (*Crossing down C.*) Where's your father?

JILL. In the dining-room.

ALICE. And your uncle? (*She has gone down below desk to the other side of it.*)

JILL. I don't know. He's somewhere about.

ALICE. Oh!

JILL (*coming down to L.C.*). We all folded up our napkins like the Arabs and slunk silently out of the dining-room one by one, leaving father engaged in prayer.

ALICE (*sits down abruptly—coming round below desk to settee R. and sitting*). It's very hot in here.

JILL. Hot! (*Runs to her and kneels above her on settee.*) Oh, you duck! That's the champagne.

ALICE. It's nothing of the sort.

JILL. We've been tickled to death at your retiring to your bedroom with a bottle.

(ROGER comes down L.C. level with them.)

ALICE. And what is there to be tickled at, pray? Please be . . . be . . . be more respectful.

JILL. Oh, how funny you are! Fancy standing on your dignity with me.

ALICE. I shall stand on whatever I like, Jill . . . Roger!

ROGER. Yes, Mrs. Everitt? (L.C.)

ALICE. Have you spoken to my husband yet?

ROGER. No. I'm going to when he comes.

ALICE. Good. I'll stay and . . . and . . . and support you.

JILL. Will you really, mother? (*Comes to ALICE and sits above her.*)

ALICE. I intend to hear exactly what takes place. I've been thinking it all out . . . upstairs. My husband will probably send you away. If he does, never mind. I'll see it's all right later on.

JILL. Oh, mother, you are a brick!

ROGER. It's most awfully good of you, Mrs. Everitt.

ALICE. N-not at all. I'm sorry to have to let you behind the scenes like this, Roger, but it's no use pretending I agree with my husband in this matter, because I don't. (*Very gravely.*) The fact is, that although it's a very rare thing in married life not to agree with your husband, it does occasionally happen, and when it happens it's just got to be lum—lum—lumped.

ROGER (*with great gravity*). I quite understand, Mrs. Everitt.

ALICE (*smiles at him*). Good boy!

(ROGER gets up to below settee C. JILL up to R. of window.)

(WILFRED enters double doors L. Shuts door. He is in his blindest mood.)

WILFRED. Ah, there you are, Elrington! (*He sees ALICE and starts.*) Alice! (*Protestingly.*) My love! (*Gets level with ALICE.*)

ALICE. Well, Wilfred, what's the matter now?

WILFRED. Surely you oughtn't to be here? Think of your head.

ALICE. My head's all right, thank you.

WILFRED. But I thought you had a headache?

ALICE. That's . . . that's as may be, Wilfred.

WILFRED. H'm! . . . H'm! . . . Well, of course you know best. (*He crosses down below desk to his chair.*) Jill, I think you'd better go to your uncle: he's alone.

(*ROGER is in front of settee c.*)

JILL. Oh, I say, can't I stop? (*Comes to top of desk.*)

ALICE (*sternly*). Do as your father tells you, Jill.

JILL (*meekly*). Very well, mother. (*She crosses ROGER to doors l.*)

(*She goes out, making secret signs to ROGER that he is to meet her when he is through. She then goes out, blowing him a kiss.*)

(*WILFRED does not see this, but has a vague sense that there is something going on. He looks first at the door as JILL disappears, then sharply at ROGER.*)

WILFRED (*perplexed about ALICE, who is still seated at upper end of settee r.*). We—we're going to work in here, my love. Shan't we disturb you?

ALICE (*pretends to be deaf*). What?

WILFRED (*leans forward over desk to settee. Louder*). I'm afraid we shall disturb you.

ALICE. Not at all.

WILFRED. Don't you think you'd be more comfortable in the drawing-room?

ALICE (*as above*). Eh?

WILFRED (*leaning over to her again*). More comfortable in the drawing-room?

ALICE (*sharply*). No!

WILFRED (*jumps*). Oh! (*Sits.*) Very well . . . very well . . . just as you like! Then we won't waste any more time.

(*ROGER comes to head of desk.*)

Ah, the evening post, I perceive.

ROGER. Yes, sir.

WILFRED (*begins to slit open letters*). I'll just look through this first.

(*ALICE signs to ROGER, who comes from desk to c. below ALICE.*)

ROGER. Mr. Everitt!

WILFRED (*blandly, continuing his occupation*). H'm?

ROGER. There's something I want to say to you before we start.

WILFRED. Is there indeed, Elrington?

ROGER. It's . . . it's about Jill.

WILFRED. You mean Miss Everitt?

ALICE. Of course he does, Wilfred. Don't be silly.

WILFRED. Really, my love! You needn't proceed, Elrington. My daughter knows my views, and will doubtless repeat them to you. That closes the incident.

(ALICE gives ROGER a nod to continue.)

(During the following ALICE makes encouraging secret signals to ROGER.)

ROGER (setting back again to head of desk). Not so far as I'm concerned, sir.

WILFRED (looks up at him). I don't know that I am interested in your point of view, Elrington.

ROGER. May I ask why not, sir? I must know what you have against me.

WILFRED. Against you, personally, nothing.

ROGER. Well, then?

WILFRED. I have other views for my daughter.

ROGER. Excuse me, sir, but you can't expect me to be satisfied with that. I love Jill and she loves me.

WILFRED. I dare say you think you do for the moment.

ROGER. Think we do! We know! We're not children.

ALICE. Splendid! (Is still sitting on settee R.)

WILFRED. Really, Alice . . . H'm! . . . I've nothing more to add, Elrington, and we're wasting time. Let us get to work.

ROGER. You . . . you . . . you refuse even to discuss it?

WILFRED. Certainly.

ROGER (hesitates, then decisively). Very well, then. I've done all I can, and I think it only fair to tell you that Jill and I haven't the faintest intention of giving each other up.

WILFRED. In that case, my boy, I am afraid I shall not be able to keep you in my employment.

ALICE. Ha!

WILFRED. I beg your pardon, Alice?

ALICE. I didn't speak.

WILFRED. I think, my dear, it would really be better if you left me to deal with this alone.

ALICE (rises and faces him). Jill is my daughter too, Wilfred, and I don't intend to be ignored. (She crosses over to arm-chair L., turns chair facing him and sits.)

ROGER (when ALICE is seated, he gets to C.). If you'd only state your objections, sir? What's wrong with me? I'm respectable.

WILFRED. I have no intention of entering into my private affairs with you, Elrington.

(There is a slight pause. Look between ALICE and ROGER.)

ROGER. And . . . and that's all you mean to say?

WILFRED. It is.

ROGER (*struggles with himself to keep his temper, then abruptly*). All right, then. I shall have to go. Better be at once, I suppose?

WILFRED. As you like.

ROGER. I'm sorry to inconvenience you——

WILFRED. My good Elrington, no man is indispensable. Young Dashwood will be delighted to take your place.

ROGER. I . . . I suppose I may refer to you, when I go after a job? I've been with you three years.

WILFRED. Naturally.

ROGER. I take it you've been satisfied with my work?

WILFRED. Quite. I shall say I discharged you because you took a liberty.

ROGER. Oh, but that's not fair. It's nothing to do with business.

WILFRED. I'm afraid I disagree. I take you into my confidence. I allow you to mix with my family, and you take advantage of your opportunities . . .

ROGER (*advances nearer to settee R.—interrupts*). But, good heavens, sir, you talk as if I'd stolen the spoons!

WILFRED. You will allow me to be the judge of what I say if I am asked for my opinion. You are perfectly at liberty to tell your next employer anything you wish about me.

ROGER. Very well! (*He crosses over towards door L., ALICE gives her hand. He returns to C.*) But before I go, I should like you to quite understand this won't make the least difference to Jill and me.

WILFRED. I understand you think it won't, Elrington.

ROGER (*hesitates, as if about to say more, then decides not to*). Good night, sir. (*Going to double doors.*)

WILFRED (*blandly*). Good night, my boy, good night. Take a cigar to see you home.

ROGER. No, thank you, sir. (*He goes towards door, opens it, then returns in distress to ALICE*). Mrs. Everitt . . .

ALICE. Wait for me in the hall, my boy. I want to speak to you.

ROGER. All right—— (*Leaves door open. He goes out.*)

(*ALICE rises and crosses over to settee and faces WILFRED indignantly. By now she is quite herself again.*)

ALICE (*close to settee R., facing WILFRED*). Oh, you ought to be ashamed!

WILFRED. Come, come, my love! I hardly imagine you are going to oppose me—a little calm reflection.

ALICE. Calm reflection! However—I'll speak to you presently, Wilfred. For the moment I'm going to console that poor boy.

(*She goes out double doors.*)

(*WILFRED rises, goes C. below settee, dismisses ALICE with a wave, then goes to mirror and adjusts tie, etc. Then crosses above desk and gets letter, comes to foot of desk and reads it. Goes up to mirror again,*

comes down R.C., says: "Sir Wilfred Everitt!" *Leans over settee and puts letter on desk. Then remembers RICHARD, and crosses over to door and calls: "Richard!"*)

WILFRED (*in a full booming voice, like a bell*). Ah, Richard, all alone?

DICK (*outside*). Yes.

WILFRED. Come in, my dear fellow, come in. (*Goes to below settee c.*)

(*He returns into the room, leaving the door open. DICK enters, closing double doors.*)

Sit down—ah, old bean! Sit down. (*With hands on DICK's shoulders, puts him on L. end of c. settee.*)

DICK (*looks at him with a whimsical expression*). Thanks. (*He sits.*)

WILFRED (*goes up to cigar cabinet in lacquer cabinet up L. and brings down two cigars*). Glad to have this opportunity for a chat. I haven't seen as much of you as I could have wished, since you returned.

DICK. You're always so infernally busy.

WILFRED. True, true. Cigar? (*Gives DICK a cigar.*)

DICK. Thank you. (*He takes one, rises and lights cigar from match-stand on table behind c. settee.*)

WILFRED comes down below desk to spirit lighter and lights his cigar.)

WILFRED. Sorry you've been left alone all the evening. I told Jill to keep you company. (*Comes to settee R. and sits.*)

DICK. Jill had other fish to fry.

WILFRED. Ah! I see you've heard?

DICK. A bit.

WILFRED. Unfortunate, my dear Richard, that you should have stumbled on the family at so disturbed a moment. Mere trifle. It will pass.

DICK. Think so? (*Comes down to arm-chair L. and sits facing WILFRED.*)

WILFRED. Boy-and-girl fancy. Calf love. In six months they will both be grateful to me.

DICK. From what I can gather, in six months they'll be married.

WILFRED. Pooh! My dear fellow! Pooh! There's a great deal of loose talk nowadays about the independence of the young. As long as one holds the purse-strings . . . (*Pats pocket.*)

(*He straightens himself and throws out his chest.*)

DICK. Gives you a pull, no doubt. (*Leans forward.*) Question is, is it fair?

WILFRED. One has one's responsibilities, my dear Richard.

DICK. Responsibilities?

WILFRED. Responsibilities! I am not easily influenced. Nor do I compromise. I never have.

DICK (*turns round to L. and puts ash on tray on table close to him—slowly as though thinking it out*). Seems to me, the man who never compromises is either intensely selfish or else a saint.

WILFRED. Ha! without describing myself as a saint, I do not think anyone could accuse me of being selfish. When one's ideal is work, one is not selfish, Richard, and work is mine. Always has been. Without boasting I can honestly say I have never swerved aside.

DICK (*wonderingly*). Is that *really* so?

WILFRED. It is. I began at school as I meant to go on. I took no interest in games and I devoted myself to study.

DICK. Good God!

WILFRED. At Oxford I did the same.

DICK (*watching him*). Ah, yes. (*Rises and goes opposite to him.*) You were at Oxford, weren't you?

WILFRED. I was. Oxford was my Alma Mater, and I think I may say I was a dutiful son.

DICK. And even there you didn't relax?

WILFRED. On the contrary, I redoubled. (*Rises and puts hand on DICK's shoulder.*) I then entered the business of my dear father and I raised it to its present position.

DICK. Well, I suppose it's a record of sorts.

WILFRED (R.C.). No, no! Not a record, Richard. I cannot pass that. Merely the devotion to duty of an average man.

DICK (L.C.). And now you've arrived? (*Looking a little to L.*) Got all you want?

WILFRED. I think I may say so.

DICK. Making a large income, I suppose?

WILFRED (*airily*). One manages . . . manages.

DICK. And what's the next move? Parliament?

WILFRED (*pleased*). Now, my dear boy, how on earth did you guess? (*Comes to him, hand on shoulder.*)

DICK. Oh, I don't know. Seems kind of suitable.

WILFRED. Strange how these things get about. (*Crosses below desk and gets Knighthood letter.*) Yes, Richard. Parliament in the Conservative interest. Now that the difficulties are overcome . . .

DICK (*going nearer to settee R.*). Oh, there've been difficulties, have there?

WILFRED. The usual opposition of the envious. When I came home to-night I was disheartened. However, by the last post I received (*he takes the letter he had looked at from the desk and hands it to DICK*)—I received this. May interest you to glance at it.

DICK (*reads it*). H'm, Knighthood! (*Looks at WILFRED.*) You must have been gratified?

WILFRED. No more than I expected. I can now go ahead assured of the full support of my party.

DICK. Quite—I see.

WILFRED. You have evidently heard the family's point of view : this will show you mine. (*Returns to desk and puts letter in drawer.*) You will now understand why Jack must take his place in the business as soon as possible.

DICK. Well . . . I see *your* reasons. (*Leaning over settee R.*)

WILFRED. And why Jill must marry in such a way as to strengthen my position. (*Sitting on lower end of desk.*)

DICK. *Your* position, yes.

WILFRED. Sir Harry Vane is a man of excellent social standing.

DICK. Friend of yours ?

WILFRED. My dear Richard, I make it my business to have useful friends. He admires Jill.

DICK. Anyone would.

WILFRED. And these things must be used. It is a grasping age, but fortunately . . . fortunately, I say . . . social influence still counts.

DICK. I thought the great idea nowadays was that we were all equal before the Lord ? (*Sitting on arm of settee, up stage end.*)

WILFRED. Undoubtedly, Richard, so we are. Equal before the Lord, yes. But, thank God, not elsewhere. (*Crosses over to L. near arm-chair.*)

DICK (*starts forward*). Everitt, you've made a joke. (*Sitting upper end of settee.*)

WILFRED (*annoyed*). A joke, Richard ? Nonsense, I am perfectly serious.

DICK (*sits on settee, up stage end*). Sorry—my mistake. And supposing the children stick out ?

WILFRED. I shall ignore them. (*Going nearer to DICK C.*)

DICK. Ignore ?

WILFRED. I always ignore opposition. It is one of my principles. If a thing doesn't suit you, pretend it's not there. You will find it presently ceases to exist.

DICK (*chuckles*). I can't imagine Jack and Jill ceasing to exist.

WILFRED. I am not uneasy. They are young : impetuous ; but when they realize it is for them I am working . . .

DICK. How for them ?

WILFRED (C.). My dear boy, surely you don't imagine it is for my own gratification I bear the heat and burden of the day ?

DICK. Isn't it ?

WILFRED (C.). It is for my family. This Knighthood, for instance—what is it to me ? I shall accept it for my wife's sake. No other reason.

DICK. You think Alice will care ?

WILFRED. A woman !

DICK. I see. (*Moves to down-stage end of settee.*)

WILFRED (*walking up round L. to window and down R. again to C.*). As for myself, if I consulted my own wishes I should ask nothing

better than to exchange this turmoil for a free and easy existence such as yours. It has been my dream to travel. (*Now level with Dick.*)

DICK. Well—what's stopping you?

WILFRED. My responsibilities.

DICK. So we're back at it again. How you do love that word!

WILFRED. It's the greatest word in the language, Richard. If it weren't for that word, I, too, might be voyaging the Southern Seas.

DICK. Think you'd enjoy it?

WILFRED. My dear fellow, it would be Paradise. Away from the incessant worry. Free from care. To lie all day on the beach in the sun. The South Sea Islands! Robert Louis Stevenson! Romance! Fifteen men on the dead man's chest! Yo! ho! ho! and a bottle of rum! Eh, Richard? Eh, my boy? (*Digs him in ribs.*)

DICK. 'Pon my soul, Everitt, you're immense?

WILFRED. Oh, I don't know. An ordinary man at heart.

DICK. No, not ordinary. Monumental!

WILFRED. Ha! You flatter me.

DICK (*with great earnestness*). No, Wilfred, I don't! (*Laugh.*)

(*ALICE re-enters at double doors L.*)

I don't, indeed!

WILFRED. Ah, my dear! There you are! Elrington gone?

ALICE (*shortly*). Yes—he's gone.

(*ALICE goes up stage L., round past windows and down to chair L., followed by WILFRED.*)

WILFRED. You are naturally distressed, my love, about this regrettable occurrence, but I feel sure that when you have thought things over—(*stop in movement*)—you will come round to the only reasonable point of view.

(*ALICE sits chair L.*)

And now, my dear, I will ask you to take our guest into the drawing-room, so that I can proceed with my work. I have been entertaining him in your absence.

(*WILFRED goes above desk to his chair. DICK gets up to front of settee c.*)

ALICE. Oh?

WILFRED. Yes. At the risk of appearing an egoist, I have been telling him about myself and my plans.

ALICE. What?

WILFRED (*louder*). Myself and my plans.

ALICE. What plans?

WILFRED (*standing at his chair—with a shade of irritation*). You

know, my love, you know. Parliament. I haven't had time to go into it all with you, but I have, this evening, received a letter.

ALICE (*not hearing*). A what?

WILFRED. A letter.

DICK (*who has been looking at ALICE and now comes to her*). I say, old thing, you seem to have struck it again.

ALICE (*vaguely*). Struck?

DICK. Queer how it comes and goes. Can't make it out.

WILFRED (*loudly*). I say I've had a letter. (*Standing and leaning over desk as he raises his voice.*)

ALICE. It's no good, Wilfred, I can't hear you. (*Rises and crosses over to head of settee R.*) I came to say there's someone downstairs who wants to see you.

(DICK retreats up stage a little.)

WILFRED. Ah! A reporter, no doubt. (*Standing.*)

ALICE. It's a Mrs. Maunders.

WILFRED (*still standing by chair at desk*). A woman, eh? Probably some political organization. Wants to know if I'm a feminist. It's beginning, beginning! Impossible to conceal anything nowadays.

ALICE. Will you see her? (*Above settee.*)

WILFRED. Might be advisable. One of the penalties of an entry into public life, my dear Richard, is that one lives, so to speak, in a glass house.

DICK. I suppose so.

ALICE. Then you *will* see her?

WILFRED (*judicially*). Yes, yes. I'll give her ten minutes.

ALICE. Very well, I told Powers to show her up when you rang.

(DICK moves to door.)

WILFRED. Very good. Very good. (*Sits L. chair.*)

ALICE. And, Wilfred! (c.)

WILFRED. Yes, my love?

ALICE. When Mrs. Maunders has finished with you . . .

WILFRED. Finished with *me*? Ha! You mean when I have finished with *her*.

ALICE. I can't hear you, Wilfred. I say when she has *finished* with you, I want to speak to you, myself. (*Going towards doors.*)

WILFRED. Certainly, my love, certainly. I know what you wish to say, and although I cannot allow myself to be influenced, I shall be glad to listen. You mustn't think I wish to leave you out.

ALICE. We shall be in the drawing-room. You can call me when you're ready. (*At doors, which DICK has opened for her.*)

WILFRED. I will make a point of it.

ALICE. Come along, Dick.

DICK. Right-o!

(*They go out doors L.*)

(WILFRED rises, goes below desk up to mirror, business of pluming himself. Crosses to bell R., rings it, then goes to desk, arranging papers, etc., sits, tries several attitudes and finally rests head on L. hand.)

(POWERS enters at door up stage L.)

POWERS. Mrs. Maunders.

(WILFRED takes no notice and does not move. MRS. MAUNDERS comes in, and POWERS goes out.)

(MRS. MAUNDERS comes slowly forward, looking at WILFRED, who behaves as if he had not heard.)

MRS. MAUNDERS. Good evening. (Near settee R.)

WILFRED (starts up in a surprised way, carelessly brushing back the lock of hair). Oh! . . . ah! . . . Good evening. Good evening. As you see, I was absorbed in my work. Won't you sit down (indicating arm-chair L.), Mrs.—er—Mrs. . . . I forget the name.

MRS. MAUNDERS (who has been staring at him with deep interest, suddenly breaks into a delighted laugh). Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Well, if it isn't Willy got fat! Of all the jokes . . . (She begins to laugh uncontrollably, moving nearer arm-chair L. Collapsing into chair L. and wiping her eyes.) Why, you're more like a cream cheese than ever, Willie!

(WILFRED during her laugh has been gazing at her in amazement. He then comes above desk to C.)

WILFRED. Who are you? What do you want? I think you must be mad. Go away. (He moves towards the bell near fireplace above desk.)

(MRS. MAUNDERS continues her laugh until he nears the bell.)

MRS. MAUNDERS. Don't ring. Best not ring. You'll remember.

WILFRED (pauses and then returns from fireplace to R.C., near settee R.). What is there for me to remember? I've never met you before. I don't know who you are. (C.)

MRS. MAUNDERS. Oh, yes, you do . . . Think of Oxford.

WILFRED. Oxford?

MRS. MAUNDERS. Nellie.

WILFRED. Nellie?

MRS. MAUNDERS. Little Nellie.

WILFRED. Little . . . (He breaks off and sinks back into settee R.). Oh, my good God!

MRS. MAUNDERS. Thought I'd pay you a visit and see how you were, and very glad I am to find you looking so well: always fond of your stomach, weren't you, Willie?

WILFRED (recovering himself). This is an outrage. (Rises and goes nearer to her. Turns on her furiously.) Why have you come? I've nothing to say to you. Nothing at all. I settled with you at

the time, and it's finished—do you hear—? finished! (*Going up stage to top of desk.*)

MRS. MAUNDERS. Not quite finished, Willie. Thought you'd like to hear about Ruth.

WILFRED. Ruth? (*Pausing at top of desk.*)

MRS. MAUNDERS. Well, she's your daughter, anyhow, when every one comes by their own. No getting over that.

WILFRED. I refuse to listen to you, and I insist on your leaving the house. (*Goes up above settee C. to door up L.*)

MRS. MAUNDERS (*rises and gets over to R.C.*). She's a woman now. Takes after you. That's awkward, isn't it?

WILFRED (*coming down from door to L.C.*). I refuse to talk to you. Once and for all, are you going?

MRS. MAUNDERS. Now, it's not a bit o' use getting excited. (*Puts her hand on WILFRED's shoulder, which he removes.*) Why not talk things over quiet like? We're friends, I suppose? I'm not threatening: though, mark you, if I *wanted* . . .

WILFRED (L.C.). Ah, so it's blackmail, is it? I might have guessed.

MRS. MAUNDERS (R.C.). You mustn't use words like that, Willie.

WILFRED. And for God's sake, woman, don't keep on calling me Willie.

MRS. MAUNDERS. Well, it's your name, Willie.

WILFRED. Is it money, or isn't it?

MRS. MAUNDERS. Well, and suppose it is.

(WILFRED *makes a step towards her, looks at her, then crosses to below desk to his chair and takes cheque-book from drawer.*)

WILFRED. How much? (*Sitting.*)

MRS. MAUNDERS (*goes nearer settee R.*). Now, listen here, you're not going to talk to me like that, not if you were crowned King of England. I'm a respectable woman except for you, and I've had a hard struggle. (*Sits on settee, takes handkerchief from bag and wipes her eyes.*)

WILFRED. I asked you how much.

MRS. MAUNDERS. Hard struggle I've had. Buried two husbands, and neither left me a ha'penny. Been a different life from yours, Willie.

WILFRED. I have a letter in this desk, signed by you, agreeing never to trouble me again. I could make things very awkward.

MRS. MAUNDERS. And where would I be? (*Puts handkerchief back in bag.*) Couldn't I make it awkward? You going to be Sir Wilfred: going into Parliament.

WILFRED. It's infamous that you should threaten me; and just now when it's so important.

MRS. MAUNDERS. Don't be silly. Why, that's just the time.

WILFRED (*rises*). Have you no sense of shame, no sense of responsibility . . . (*He chokes on the word.*)

MRS. MAUNDERS. Yes, I have, but I know you. You've not changed. Same old Willie!

WILFRED (*choking*). I . . . I . . . Oh!

MRS. MAUNDERS. Never were free with your money. Wouldn't give it me now, if you could help.

WILFRED (*almost shouting*). Woman, be quiet! Say what you want and let there be an end. (*Sits.*)

MRS. MAUNDERS (*subsiding*). Allright. I'm agreeable (*rises*), only just keep a civil tongue in your head, that's all. I want . . . (*Gulps.*) I want . . .

WILFRED. Well? . . . I'm waiting.

MRS. MAUNDERS (*blurts out*). Two hundred a year and no questions asked.

WILFRED (*aghast*). Two hundred a year?

MRS. MAUNDERS. Two hundred pounds paid in advance, and that's my last word. Now, then!

WILFRED. Preposterous! (*Rises, goes above desk and behind table C. and then down L.C. to her L.*). Why, even if I did, what guarantee have I you won't come back? (*C.*)

MRS. MAUNDERS. None.

WILFRED. And you actually expect . . . (*Comes level with her.*)

MRS. MAUNDERS (*standing near top end of settee R.*). Seems to me you can't help yourself.

(*WILFRED looks at her and then looks away L.*)

But you needn't worry. I'm a woman of my word, and what I say goes.

WILFRED. You said that last time.

MRS. MAUNDERS. And 'aven't I kept to it all these years? Strikes me that's good enough. Shouldn't get rich if you don't want to pay. "Tit-Bits" said you were worth ten thousand a year.

(*There is a slight pause. WILFRED looks at her, considers, and then goes below desk to his chair.*)

WILFRED (*after a struggle—when at desk*). If I give you a cheque, will you go?

MRS. MAUNDERS. Oh, I'll go fast enough. I'm not one to stop where I'm not wanted. Never was.

WILFRED. Very well.

(*He sits down and writes out cheque. She continues talking. In spite of being sure of her ground, she is relieved at having managed so well.*)

MRS. MAUNDERS (*sits on settee R.*). And why you're making all this fuss, goodness only knows. What's two hundred a year? There's a many would have asked double.

(*WILFRED hands her the cheque without rising—over the settee.*)

WILFRED. Send me an address where the money can be paid in future, and now go!

MRS. MAUNDERS (*stuffs it into her bag*). Well, I'm going, aren't I?

WILFRED. And never let me see you again.

MRS. MAUNDERS. Think I wanted to come? Think it's a song and dance? Gracious me, what are you looking so green about? I only want me rights. Anyone'd think I'd murdered the man!

WILFRED. Are you going, or must I have you turned out?

MRS. MAUNDERS. You won't do that, Willie. (*Rises.*) And, look here, I'll tell you what's wrong with *you*. You eat too much. You're pasty—don't digest your food; and then, when a little thing like this comes along, it floors you.

WILFRED (*grinding his teeth*). Oh-h! (*Rises and goes up stage round back to door up L.—flings it open, standing L. of it.*)

MRS. MAUNDERS. Well, if you won't be chatty, you won't. (*Gets up to door below c. settee.*) Done my best. (*Holds out her hand.*) So long!

WILFRED (*ignoring it*). And if you come here again, please understand you won't be admitted.

MRS. MAUNDERS. Don't get excited. I shan't come again. Got what I want. No offence meant and none taken. Been quite like old times, having a chat. Nighty night!

(*Exit.*)

(WILFRED closes door. Waits, opens it again and listens. Door slams. He closes it. He comes back into the room. He mops his face with his handkerchief and tries to recover himself, then comes down to the desk and begins to pull the papers about, mechanically opens and shuts the inkpot, moves a paper-weight and so on. He puts cheque-book in drawer, and as he bangs drawer ALICE enters from double doors—she closes double doors. Her manner is grave.)

WILFRED (*starts*). Alice!

ALICE (*up above arm-chair L.*). I heard the front door. Has she gone?

WILFRED (*standing at his chair—nervously*). What? . . . Yes . . . why? What is it? Do you want anything?

ALICE. I want to speak to you, I told you so. Don't you remember?

WILFRED (*going up to top of desk—wearily*). Oh, God, must it be now?

ALICE (*deliberately*). Yes . . . it must be now.

WILFRED. If it's the children, I've no time. (*Going up round by window to L.*) I can't be bothered with trivialities. (*Just below table near c. settee.*)

ALICE (*as above*). Jill and Roger aren't trivialities, Wilfred—

WILFRED (*up L. Stops and looks at her, momentarily struck*). Eh?

(*He resumes his pacing.*) Oh, very well, have it your own way. (*Crossing down to below desk and round it.*) No peace! Worry, worry, worry from morning till night.

ALICE. What are you worried about?

WILFRED. It's nothing. It's of no consequence. (*Near his chair.*)

ALICE. Did Mrs. Maunders upset you? (*Near arm-chair L.*)

WILFRED (*turns and faces her suspiciously*). Mrs. Maunders? Mrs. Maunders has nothing to do with it. Nothing whatever. What . . . what makes you think so?

ALICE. Well . . . only that you seemed rather more cheerful than usual till she came. . . . (*Going over to front of settee R.*) And then when I come in I find you like this.

WILFRED. Like what?

ALICE. You say you are worried and you complain no one sympathizes. At the same time you give no earthly reason why anyone should.

WILFRED. Really, Alice, your manner . . .

ALICE. Surely things are going well enough. The Knighthood's settled. You've got a constituency. You told me the business was doing splendidly. What do you want? (*In front of settee R.*)

WILFRED (*majestically*). May I ask if it is to say *this* that you've interrupted me?

ALICE (*sadly*). No. (*Sits on settee R.*)

WILFRED (*still standing by chair*). Then perhaps you will kindly explain why you take up my time?

ALICE. Because . . . I'm desperate. (*Facing him.*) I can't stand it any more, and I'm not going to. (*Sits.*)

WILFRED. I'm afraid you're hysterical, my dear. You'd better go to bed; I'll ring for your maid. (*He is about to ring.*)

ALICE. You'll stay where you are!

WILFRED (*jumps*). What? (*He comes round by top of desk to L.C., level with her.*)

ALICE. You'll stay where you are, and you'll listen! (*She pulls herself together—when he sits.*) Now then, to begin with. Jack's left the house!

WILFRED. Left the house? (L.C.)

ALICE. He's gone to live with a friend in Chelsea. He's going to take up art and he's not coming back.

WILFRED (L.C.). Oh! He'll come back fast enough when he runs short.

ALICE. He won't run short. (*Rises.*) I shan't let him.

WILFRED. I beg your pardon?

ALICE. It's no use getting excited—I mean it. I've given him my pendant to begin with, and I shall give him my other things as he needs them . . .

WILFRED. You've given—him—your—pendant? (L.C.)

ALICE. Yes.

WILFRED. Have you gone mad?

ALICE. Never saner in my life, and I'm going to help Jack by every means in my power. That's number one. The next is Roger.

WILFRED. I absolutely refuse to discuss. . . . (*Crosses below desk. He stops and turns to her.*)

ALICE. Don't interrupt! (*She goes up and stands above his desk.*) You've sent him away—sacked him. And why?

(*WILFRED sits in chair.*)

Because Roger, as nice, clean, decent a boy as anyone could wish to see, wants to marry Jill. When I think that if you had your way you'd actually encourage her to marry Sir Harry Vane, whose very name is a byword—an old devil! . . . (*She gets to table L.*)

WILFRED. Alice! Your language!

ALICE. Bother my language—it's nothing to what I'm thinking. Well, Wilfred, you're not going to do it (*bangs L. hand on table*), for the simple reason that I won't have it!

WILFRED (*still seated at desk—almost speechless*). You won't have it!

ALICE (*going towards him to front of settee R.*). You think because I've never spoken to you before, because I've been patient all these years and made the best of things, that I'd stand anything. So . . . so I would for myself. (*Crosses to him.*) But when it comes to the children— No! I won't have them sacrificed! I won't! I won't! I won't! (*Facing him in front of settee R.*) And that's the end of it.

(*There is a slight pause.*)

WILFRED (*rises*). Well, if anyone had told me . . . you, my wife—to turn against me!

(*ALICE moves up to C. settee and sits L. end of it.*)

For twenty-three years I've been a good husband to you. (*Goes up to her on her R.*)

ALICE. Good husband! Well, it's true you haven't beaten me and you don't drink. But do you suppose those are the *worst* things? Not they! What's far *worse* is that the spirits of the whole family *sink* when you come into the room; that—

(*Movements of retreat for WILFRED.*)

all conversation *stops*; that the children's one idea is to get away, that I can't keep them at home because of *you*! That's what matters, Wilfred, and that's been the atmosphere all our married life.

WILFRED (*now L., in front of settee R.*). I make every excuse for you, Alice, because I can see you're not yourself.

ALICE. There you are wrong. For once that's just what I am.

WILFRED. Then I heartily regret to hear it. (*He goes to desk, below it.*)

ALICE (*still sitting on settee c.*). It's no good taking that tone. This is the first real conversation we've ever had and we're going to finish it. Oh, if only I'd stuck out long ago! I did do my best, but you won, you were too much for me. You were like a fog—a thick boring fog.

WILFRED. Boring? . . . You mean to say I've bored you?

ALICE (*throwing up her hands*). Bored me? Good God! and to think you've never guessed—it's *tragic*! That two people can live together as we have—year in, year out—intimately, and one of them remain so completely ignorant of what the other is like. (*Rises.*) Why, you've known no more of me than if I were a stranger in the street—(*comes to front of settee R.*)—and yet there we were—compelled to march solemnly along—side by side—toward the grave. (*Sits on settee R. She breaks down.*) I shall be glad when I get there. At any rate, I shall have my coffin to myself! That's something.

WILFRED (*standing by chair*). Don't be profane, Alice! Besides, if what you say is true—if you really had these—these most unbecoming sentiments—couldn't you mention it?

ALICE. Mention it! (*Hysterically, laughing and crying.*) Heavens above, what a word! No, I couldn't mention it. There are some things it's no use mentioning.

WILFRED. I fail to follow you.

ALICE (*turns on him*). Very well, then, I'll make it clear. Why do you suppose I became deaf?

WILFRED. Became deaf?

ALICE. I'm not really deaf. I never have been. I invented it.

WILFRED. Invented!

ALICE. So that I needn't answer you when you came home every evening one big groan, with all the grievances. All the people who'd been rude, all the people who'd slighted you, all the people who hadn't recognized your importance. You didn't keep on so long, when you thought I couldn't hear.

WILFRED. I'm revolted! (*Goes up above desk to front of c. settee.*)

ALICE. Why, it's all that's kept me sane. There's only one thing I'm sorry about—that I can't pass on the hint to other wives. There must be so many cases where it would be useful.

WILFRED. Oh, but this—this—(*sits on R. end of c. settee*) is a calamity. It's the break-up of our home.

(ALICE rises.)

ALICE (*comes to him and puts her L. hand on his shoulder*). We've never had a home, Wilfred, you've never wanted one. You've only wanted an audience and I've provided it. But I've had enough and, if it's to go on, I'm going to get something out of it—the children—at any rate the children shall be saved from the wreck. So now you know. (*Comes down to front of arm-chair L.*)

WILFRED (*rises*). I—I think we'd better stop this discussion. I'll talk to you to-morrow, Alice. (*Goes down below desk.*)

ALICE. No. Not to-morrow! Now!

(WILFRED *turns, below desk.*)

(*Goes up to below table near c. settee.*) You'd better be careful, Wilfred. I've been loyal to you so far, but you'd better be careful.

WILFRED (*he comes up to R.C., facing her*). I . . . I . . . (*Bursts out.*) No, I will not be careful—I won't be bullied like this. I decline to discuss it at all.

ALICE (L.C.). Very well, then. You must take the consequences.

WILFRED (R.C.). Consequences?

ALICE. I shall stick at nothing and I shall act at once. I shall make a scandal.

WILFRED. A scandal?

ALICE. There's always Mrs. Maunders, isn't there?

WILFRED (*retreats and sits on settee R. Collapses*). Good heavens! You know about her?

ALICE. Of course I know. (*She goes up round R. of settee c., draws curtains and opens window.*)

(*There is a pause, then he attempts to clothe the situation.*)

WILFRED (*after ALICE has thrown open window*). My . . . my dear wife . . . I needn't tell you how distressed . . . how ashamed

ALICE. What's that matter? (*Comes down L.*) It's only a detail.

WILFRED. You call my sin a detail?

ALICE. Yes. Do let's be sincere, whatever we are. It may be a sin or not. Depends on your point of view. (*Coming down L.*) But, anyway, it's ages old and I really can't bother about it now. I'm only thankful it's come in so handy.

WILFRED. Handy? (*Big laugh.*)

ALICE. As a lever. (*To front of table L.*) I've warned you and I've given you every chance. Now I shall take things in hand.

WILFRED. What are you going to do?

ALICE. I'm going to side with the children—I'm going away.

WILFRED. Because of that woman?

ALICE. No—not because of that woman. I don't care a row of pins about that woman. (*Gets L.C.*)

WILFRED (*slowly*). Then you mean . . . this is the end? (*Still sitting on settee R.*)

ALICE. Yes.

WILFRED (*rises*). You—you won't make a scandal? Think! My love, think! Just at this time! Responsibility! Dignity! Appearances!

ALICE (*throws up her arms in despair*). Oh, God! And you can

still talk like that! (*She turns on him furiously.*) What d'you think I care for those things compared with Jack and Jill? What d'you think I've ever cared for them? I hate them. They've been the curse of my life! Damn the dignity! Damn the responsibility! And *damn the appearances!* Now we know where we are!

(*Quite beside herself, she rushes out, banging the door behind her.*)

(*He sits there gaping after her, open-mouthed.*)

QUICK CURTAIN.

ACT III

SCENE.—*The scene is the same. Three days later.*

TIME.—*Early afternoon. Lamps, flowers and vases on table removed.*

(When the CURTAIN rises the stage is empty. Then the door down L. opens and DICK puts his head in.)

DICK *(turning and speaking to someone outside)*. It's all right. There's no one here. *(Stands back as—ALICE enters. He closes door.)*

(ALICE comes in. She is in outdoor things and makes a sad impression.)

ALICE. We won't stay a minute. I only want . . . just to look. *(Slowly she crosses over to settee R.)*

(She comes forward slowly and looks round the room. A taxi is heard outside. DICK goes to the window and looks out R. of it.)

DICK. The luggage is all on. Powers is talking to the driver. *(Closes window.)* I wonder if she's telling him.

ALICE *(only half attending)*. Probably.

DICK. I suppose she's spotted what's up?

ALICE. Have you ever known a servant not? *(Going up round behind desk to top end.)*

DICK. Did she say anything to you? I mean when she was helping you just now? *(In front of settee C.)*

ALICE. No, but I could tell. She spoke in such a depressed whisper: rather as if I were going to have an operation.

(JILL bursts in door up stage, with hat and coat on. DICK gets up behind settee R.)

JILL *(comes down to L. of ALICE and opposite to her)*. Well, darling, I'm hopping it. I'll drop the lot at your pub and then I'll bring Roger back here, and settle up with father.

ALICE. Very well, dear.

JILL *(affectionately)*. And look here, don't stay sentimentalizing, mother. It does no good and it only upsets you.

ALICE *(standing at head of settee R., a little hurt)*. Oh, Jill!

JILL. Think what a jolly evening we're going to have. All together and no father to depress us.

ALICE. I know, dear, I know.

JILL (*reluctant to leave her*). Well . . . can't wait with the three-pences ticking up. Have to watch these things nowadays. (*Coming L. a little and turning to DICK, who is up stage.*) See she doesn't mope, Dickie.

DICK. I'll see to it.

(JILL goes out up stage door L.)

ALICE. Youth is hard!

DICK (*comes down to ALICE*). But sensible. Now, dear, you don't want Wilfred to catch you?

ALICE. At three in the afternoon! That *would* be a miracle. (*Crosses over to table L.*)

DICK (*watching her as she moves round*). It's the first time he's gone to the City since you left. He may come back early.

(ALICE begins to wander about the room, gently fingering things here and there.)

ALICE. He'll have too much to do . . . the accumulation . . . (*She crosses over to mantel, above desk.*)

DICK. I'm not so sure. He might guess you'd only be waiting till he was out of the way, to fetch the rest of your things.

ALICE (*rather bitterly*). Not he. It's taken him exactly three days to get over it. Now he's gone back to work, and, as he would say himself, put it behind him.

DICK (*at head of settee R.*). And you must follow his example. Believe me, there's only *one* way to deal with a situation of this sort and that is to cut it clean out.

ALICE (*pathetically, leans head on arm, at mantel*). I'm doing my best, Dick.

DICK. You'll be all right once we're afloat. You love the sea, and it's the very best time for the tropics.

ALICE (*in tears*). I never have liked coco-nuts.

DICK. Idiot!

ALICE (*passing her finger along the mantelpiece*). What a mess it's all in! They can't have dusted since I left. I've always suspected Powers wasn't thorough. I wonder if my duster . . .

(*She goes towards drawer in desk, top drawer, upper end.*)

DICK. My dear girl, you're not going to start spring cleaning! (c.)

ALICE (*rummaging in drawer*). I can't leave it like this, Dick. It's filthy.

DICK. Oh, Lord! (c.)

ALICE. It's not here. They've taken it!

DICK. That's a comfort, anyhow. (*Standing c.*)

ALICE. I do wish they'd leave my things alone. (*Comes to below desk.*) They've plenty of their own dusters, and yet they must always come and take . . .

(*She is stopped by DICK, who goes to her and catches her by the wrist.*)

DICK. Alice . . . you're not repenting? (*Comes down to L. of ALICE R.*)

ALICE. Repenting?

DICK. You don't mean you . . . want to stay after all?

ALICE (*slowly*). No . . . I don't think I ever want to see him again. I don't—think so.

DICK. Then what in hell does it matter whether it's dusty or not? Do come on.

ALICE. In a minute, Dick. (*She looks round lingeringly.*) How queer it all seems! (*Going up c.*)

DICK. Queer?

ALICE (*now at R. end of settee, sits*). I've spent most of my life in this room, and now I'm going out of it for the last time. I've sat in that chair (*chair L.*) hour after hour, year after year . . . listening to Wilfred . . . I've almost sat it through . . . and now it's over—and I shall be dead and buried somewhere and never see it again. Even if you've hated a place, Dick, it's frightening to think you're seeing it for the last time in your life.

DICK. You know, dear, you'll make yourself ill. (*Puts his hand on her shoulder.*)

ALICE. It was the children's favourite room. I've been happy with them here. They were such ducks, and it really wasn't my fancy. They used regularly to be stopped in the street and admired. (*Sighs.*) Look, that's the place where Jack burnt a hole in the carpet when he got hold of a box of matches! (*Clinging to him.*) Oh, Dick, I wish I couldn't see their ghosts playing.

DICK. My dear, you mustn't work yourself up like this.

ALICE. No—you're right. We'll go. (*Rises, comes down c.*)

DICK. Yes. (*Goes up to door up stage L., opens it and stands L. of it, waiting.*)

ALICE (*looks round the room for the last time and kisses her hand to it. She speaks softly*). I shall never see you again. Good-bye—my memories!

(*Light for door slam.*)

(*She hesitates a moment, then goes slowly towards the door. Door slam as ALICE reaches door up L. Just as she reaches it, the front door bangs. They both stop and start.*)

ALICE. What's that? (*Standing R. of door up stage. DICK is L. of her.*)

DICK. Hold on a jiffy, I'll see. (*He gently opens the door to the landing, and peers out.*) I thought as much! (*Closes door.*) There's your miracle for you. It's Wilfred, and he's coming up.

ALICE (*goes hastily to door*). Oh, do let me have a peep. Does he look ill?

DICK. Don't be silly, Alice. You don't want to be caught, do you?

(*DICK goes to door L., followed by ALICE.*)

ALICE. No, perhaps you're right. We'll go through the drawing-room. Then we can slip out the other way.

DICK. You can. I'll stop behind and see him. After all, it's only fair to let him know what's going to happen.

(*They go off double doors L.*)

(*Light for WILFRED'S entrance.*)

(*There is a slight pause, then WILFRED enters door up L. He is in City clothes. He looks as if he had not slept, and has generally the air of a man who has lost his bearings. He sits first on settee C. dejectedly, then rises and goes to chair at desk and sits. Dust bus. Dusts photo of ALICE.*)

(*Light for POWERS' entrance as WILFRED sits at desk and dusts photo of ALICE.*)

(*POWERS enters. He takes no notice for a moment and she hesitates.*)

POWERS. H'm!

WILFRED (*in a tired voice*). Yes, Peters, what is it?

POWERS. I heard you come in, sir. I came to ask if you'd like your tea now. (*Comes to C.*)

WILFRED. I don't want any, thank you. I'm not hungry.

POWERS. Excuse me, sir, but you *must* eat. You've not eaten enough for a sparrer the last three days, and you such an 'earty feeder as a rule.

WILFRED (*wearily*). Oh, all right. You can bring it when I ring.

POWERS. Yes, sir.

(*The door to the drawing-room opens with a slight noise. WILFRED looks up.*)

WILFRED. Shut that door, will you, Peters?

POWERS. Yes, sir.

(*She crosses and shuts it, returns to head of desk.*)

POWERS. Cook wants to know if you can let her have some money, sir.

WILFRED (*vaguely*). Some money?

POWERS. For the housekeeping. The mistress said we were to ask you for anything we wanted, sir.

WILFRED (*starts*). Oh? Has your mistress been here?

POWERS. She came this afternoon, sir. She fetched away the rest of her things.

WILFRED. I see . . . (*He pulls out note-case.*) Will . . . will twenty pounds do?

POWERS. That'll do nicely, sir.

(*He hands it to her in £5 notes.*)

Thank you, sir, and we're expecting the plumber about the kitchen range. Will you see him when he comes?

WILFRED. The plumber?

(*ALICE'S hand is seen on door of drawing-room.*)

POWERS. Yes, sir.

WILFRED. I don't want to see the plumber.

POWERS. He wants to see you, sir. He says it'll all have to come out, and we shan't be able to cook on it for weeks, and there won't be no hot water, nor nothing.

WILFRED. Oh, Lord!

POWERS. So will you see him, sir?

WILFRED (*irritably*). Can't you see him? Tell him to do what's necessary. You must . . . er . . . manage, Peters.

POWERS (*helplessly*). Oh, very well, sir. (*She turns to go below c. settee to door up L.*)

WILFRED. By the way, you might tell Miss Jill I should like to speak to her.

POWERS. Miss Jill is out, sir. (*Near door up stage.*)

WILFRED. Oh! . . . That's all, then, Peters.

POWERS. Thank you, sir. (*Comes down to below table near c. settee.*) If you don't mind, sir, my name isn't Peters, it's Powers.

WILFRED (*looks at her*). Powers? But aren't you the parlour-maid?

POWERS. Yes, sir, but my name's Powers all the same. You're thinking of the last one.

WILFRED. Oh, I see. You're new.

POWERS. Not exactly new, sir. Been here five years.

WILFRED. Five years? I'm . . . er . . . sorry. I ought to have noticed.

POWERS. It's quite all right, sir. (*Going up again to door.*)

WILFRED (*rises and goes above desk to R.C. below c. settee and on her R. Anxious not to be left alone*). Five years? That's a long time . . . and . . . and are you happy with us, Peters—I mean Powers?

POWERS (*comes L.C.*). Oh, yes, sir, thank you, sir. We're all very fond of the mistress, sir.

WILFRED. I'm glad of that.

POWERS. You see she takes an interest. You can talk to *her*.

WILFRED. Yes . . . (*He sighs.*) I suppose that's what matters, isn't it? (*Sits on c. settee.*)

POWERS. Yes, sir. When cook had her operation, sir, she was like a mother to her.

WILFRED. Has cook had an operation?

POWERS (*in front of L. end of C. settee*). Why, yes, sir. Don't you remember? Two months ago next Monday.

WILFRED. I . . . er . . . I must have forgotten.

POWERS. And then when I became engaged, sir, the mistress was quite excited. Made me bring my fiancé to see her.

WILFRED. What! Are you engaged?

POWERS. Yes, sir. Going to be married next month.

WILFRED. Oh dear me! Then we . . . I . . . we shall lose you. I . . . I'm sorry, Pet . . . Powers.

POWERS. I'm sorry too, sir, but we were bound to take this chance. It's in Australia, sir.

WILFRED. You're going to Australia?

POWERS. That's right, sir.

WILFRED. But do you think you'll like it?

POWERS. I shall miss London, sir, but of course I'm a country girl, really, and so's my fiancé. He! he! he! What I mean is, he's a farmer, sir.

WILFRED. Oh, yes, I see. Well, Powers, as I say, we . . . er . . . we shall be sorry to lose you. (*Rises from C. settee. He hesitates and fidgets, then pulls out his pocket-book again and produces some Treasury notes.*) I wonder if . . . perhaps . . . you'd kindly accept a trifle . . . buy yourself something? Outfit. (*He holds them out awkwardly.*)

POWERS. Oh, sir! That is good of you. Thank you, sir.

(*Exit door up L.*)

WILFRED. That's all right.

(*WILFRED, left alone, goes up round R. of settee C. to window and then to behind C. settee, then stops and puts his hands in front of his face, and says out loud:*)

I don't know what to do. (*Behind C. settee.*)

(*The drawing-room door opens and ALICE half comes through as if to come to him. DICK pulls her back. WILFRED hears something, turns, notices that the door is open again and going to it shuts it absentmindedly. He stands a minute thinking, then says:*)

Richard! (*He goes to the telephone above desk.*) Hallo! Hallo! . . . Southern 2135 . . . yes, 2135. Thank you. (*Pause.*) Hallo! Is that you, Richard? Oh, the porter! . . . Oh . . . Mr. Hardingham's out, is he? (*In a depressed voice.*) No—there's no message. Thank you. (*He hangs up receiver, sits in his chair at desk.*)

(*Light for POWERS as WILFRED sits.*)

(*POWERS re-enters, closes door.*)

POWERS. If you please, sir——

WILFRED. Yes?

POWERS. There's a young woman in the hall wants to see you, sir—name of Smith.

WILFRED. I couldn't see anyone to-day, you must tell her.

POWERS. I *did* tell her, sir, but she won't go. Says she has a message for you.

WILFRED. A message?

POWERS. From the person who was here the other day, sir—Maunder I think the name was.

WILFRED. Oh dear me!

POWERS. Shall I tell her it's no use, sir?

WILFRED. No, no, on no account! You must show her up, Powers. Show her up at once.

POWERS. Very good, sir. (*She goes out door up stage.*)

(*WILFRED rises and goes to fireplace with his back to it.*)

(*Light for POWERS as WILFRED stands with back to fireplace.*)

(*There is a slight pause. Then POWERS shows in RUTH.*)

POWERS. Miss Smith.

(*RUTH comes in. She is a perfectly self-possessed, well-grown woman of about 27 or 28. Her dress is quiet, but smart, and without being pretty, she has a finished, effective appearance. Her manner is brisk and not conciliatory.*)

RUTH. Good afternoon. (*Comes down L.C.*)

WILFRED. Good afternoon. (*Comes to below desk.*)

RUTH. Sorry to disturb you, but I couldn't help it. Shan keep you long. I'm Ruth—Ruth Smith, your daughter.

WILFRED (*comes up to her R.*). My . . . my daughter . . . you? (*He sinks into settee R., prepared for more trouble.*)

RUTH (*C.*). Now, it's quite all right, no necessity to fuss. I've not come to make a scene, Mr. . . . Mr. . . . (*She breaks off.*) Really, I hardly know how to address you.

WILFRED (*feebly*). To address me?

RUTH. Well . . . Mr. Everitt doesn't seem the thing, does it? And I'm certainly not going to call you daddy. (*She looks at him with a sarcastic smile.*) Perhaps Uncle Wilfred would suit. Be a compromise, wouldn't it?

WILFRED. I . . . er . . . I really . . .

(*He puts his hand to his head.*)

RUTH. Quite . . . it is awkward for you, isn't it? But you've no call to get the wind up. I've brought back the cheque, that's all.

WILFRED (*starts*). The cheque?

RUTH. The one you gave mother. She'd no business to take it. I didn't half give it her, when I found out.

WILFRED (*staring at her*). You . . . you mean to say you've brought it back?

RUTH. I don't *mean* to say it, I *have* said it. I knew directly I saw her she'd been up to some of her games, and I never rested till I'd wormed it out. Luckily she'd had a couple, so it was easy.

WILFRED. But, my dear young lady . . . (*rises*) . . . er . . . that is . . . my dear daughter . . .

RUTH. Oh, drop it! (*Backing a little to L.*) You can call me Miss Smith.

WILFRED. My dear . . . Miss Smith.

RUTH. And you can cut out the dear. I'm not taking any sob stuff!

WILFRED (R.C.). Of course, I know you must think very badly of me?

RUTH. Really . . . fancy you knowing that! (L.C.)

WILFRED. B-but I don't understand why you have brought the cheque back?

RUTH (*fiercely*). Don't you, though? Then I'll explain. (*Goes nearer to him.*) I've brought it back because I wouldn't accept a farthing from you, not if I was starving. I'd go on the Parish first, and so shall mother if I've anything to do with it.

WILFRED. Oh, b-but you . . . you quite mistake the position. I'm *glad* your mother came to me. I'm glad to be able to help her . . . and you.

RUTH. You don't say so! (*Goes up stage to R. end of C. settee.*) Taken you a good time to find out!

WILFRED. Perhaps if you'd let me explain. (*He goes up stage to L. of her.*)

RUTH (*turns to him*). What's there to explain? I know all about it. This money was given on the strict understanding you see and hear nothing of us. Well . . . we're not taking any, that's all.

WILFRED (*coming down to chair and table L.*). I . . . I'm bound to admit that *was* the arrangement, but . . . er . . . things have altered. As a matter of fact, I was on the point of writing to your mother.

RUTH (*suspiciously*). What about?

WILFRED. To . . . er . . . to ask her if she would bring you to see me. I . . . er . . . wanted—if you would—allow me—to take a more personal interest in your affairs than I have done hitherto.

RUTH (*still up at R. end of settee C.*). Take an interest in *me*! Fat lot of interest you've taken in me for the last twenty-eight years . . . and in mother.

WILFRED. I . . . I know I've been to blame.

RUTH. That's a mild way of putting it.

WILFRED. But I want to make amends. *Honestly* I do.

RUTH. 'Course you do, and shall I tell you *why*?

WILFRED. Why?

RUTH (*coming down R. of him*). Because you're frightened the

money's not enough. You're frightened we won't keep quiet. Well, you needn't worry. (*Close to him.*) You can sleep quite easy—we'll keep quiet for *nothing*. I'll see to that. I'm not proud of the connection, any more than you are.

WILFRED. Miss Smith, I . . . I assure you you're wrong.

RUTH. Oh, no, I'm not. Great Scott, what do you take me for? Leave us alone for years, and then all of a sudden, because mother puts you through it—you turn pious. You'd best guess again, Mr. Everitt. (*She goes up stage R. to window.*)

WILFRED. If only you'd believe I'm sincere!

RUTH. Well, I won't, so that's that! If you'd ever made the slightest attempt before, I might, but, oh dear no, you'd had your fun and all you wanted was to cover your tracks. There's just one word describes it, and that's *mean*. (*Comes down to near settee R.*)

WILFRED. I can only repeat I'm sorry.

RUTH. And who do you think cares about that at this time of day? Sorry, indeed. Why, it's an insult. (*Sits on settee R.*)

WILFRED. It . . . it isn't meant that way.

RUTH. Isn't it? And how about my point of view? I'm as much your child as the others, and if you think I'm going to have money chucked at me on the sly, as if I was the one to blame—well, I'm not. So there we are!

WILFRED. You won't give me a chance? . . .

RUTH (*rises and goes L.C.*). Why should I? You've had your chance. You've had it all these years. (*Pause as WILFRED crosses her to R. below his desk.*) There've been times . . . times when I'd have been glad of a little help—

(WILFRED turns to her.)

—not money, but . . . well, what you might call affection. Often and often I've been miserable. (*Returns to L.C.*) Mother's no good. But now I've pulled through, and I don't want you . . .

(WILFRED sits at desk.)

. . . ever. (*Goes to front of settee R.*) So there's your cheque, and that's that—(*throws cheque on desk over back of settee*). I'm glad I've seen you. I've always wanted to tell you what I thought of you, and now I've done it. I'll wish you good day. (*She goes towards the door up L.*)

WILFRED (*rises*). No,—no; please don't go . . . wait a minute. (*He goes to below R. end of c. settee.*)

RUTH (*turns at L. of door*). What for? I've said *my* say.

WILFRED. But I haven't . . . I . . . you distress me very much. (*Sits on c. settee.*) I know all you say is right. But I'm in trouble. (*In a low voice.*) I'm alone.

RUTH (*comes down to table near c. settee*). What d'you mean? You've got your family.

WILFRED. My family . . . (*gulps*) hate me—just as you do. I'm a failure.

RUTH. A failure? You? With your title and your money and your huge business and all!

WILFRED. Yes, with all that.

RUTH (*comes near to his L. slowly and looks at him puzzled*). Why, what on earth's the matter with you? You're—you're not crying, are you?

WILFRED (*still sitting on settee C.*). Will you let me look at you?

RUTH. Look at me? But you are looking at me! (*Backing down to front of arm-chair.*)

WILFRED (*rises*). I mean without your hat.

(*RUTH takes off her hat with her left hand and holds it. WILFRED comes to her, looks at her and passes his hand over her hair.*)

Thank you. (*He crosses over to lower end of settee R.*)

RUTH. Good Lord, man, pull yourself together! (*Puts on her hat again, where she stands.*)

WILFRED. How can I, when every one's against me? (*He has crossed to front of settee R.*)

RUTH (*she is down L. near table*). Who's against you? Look here—you've been having a night out, or something! Strikes me, what you're short of is a double Scotch-and-soda!

WILFRED. Miss Smith . . . Ruth . . . can't you forgive me? I mean for neglecting you all these years? I should like to look after you. If you'd be friends and if you'd take the money without conditions, I'd be so grateful.

(*There is a moment's pause.*)

RUTH. I can't do that. (L.C.)

WILFRED. It would give me such pleasure. (R.C.)

RUTH. Well, if you aren't queer! Blessed if I can make you out. First you take no notice of us at all, and then all of a sudden . . . Wonder if I was too hard on you? Seems to me you're more soppy than anything else.

WILFRED. I suppose—I am.

RUTH. But I can't take the money, all the same. Still I—I don't mind shaking hands, if that's any satisfaction. (*Offers her hand.*)

WILFRED. That's good of you.

(*They shake hands.*)

RUTH. And take my advice, and have a bit of pluck! Whatever your troubles are, they couldn't be as bad as you look. There's a silver lining to every cloud.

WILFRED. So they say. (*Still holding her hand.*)

RUTH. Well . . . good-bye.

WILFRED. Good-bye—and thank you. (*She is about to move, when he draws her back.*) I—I suppose you wouldn't come and see me again sometime?

RUTH. What'd be the use? We'd never mix. (*She takes her*

hand away.) 'Tisn't as though there was any tie between us. (*She is now near table up C.*)

WILFRED. No—I—I suppose there isn't. (*He moves to bell round top of desk.*)

RUTH. No, don't. I'll let myself out. Best not attract attention. (*She goes out door up stage L.*)

(*Left alone, WILFRED slowly tears up the cheque.*)

(*The drawing-room door down L. moves again—WILFRED looks at it vaguely.*)

WILFRED. Must be the draught!

(*He goes towards it, as if to examine it, but as he reaches it, DICK comes in, leaving the door open behind him.*)

(*Startled.*) Richard, I'm very glad to see you.

DICK. I—er—came to tell you about Alice. (*Crosses WILFRED to below C. settee, R. of it.*)

WILFRED (*brokenly*). How is she? (*L. of DICK.*)

DICK. All right. (*Below C. settee.*)

WILFRED (*as above*). Is there . . . is there no hope for me, Richard?

DICK. I'm afraid not, old chap. . . . She's coming away with me.

WILFRED. With you? (*Comes to chair down L. and sits.*)

DICK (*coming down a little to C. level with WILFRED and R. of him*). I shall go back sooner than I intended, and I've arranged for her to come and stay with me. She'll be better out of the way for a time.

WILFRED (*piteously*). But, Richard, must she? After all, I'm giving in . . . I'm giving in, about everything. Surely that makes a difference?

DICK (*shakes his head*). I'm afraid not. Fact is—she's made up her mind.

WILFRED (*in a low voice*). Am I so much to blame . . . as that?

DICK. That's a difficult question. I'd rather not answer it.

WILFRED. After all, what have I done that's so terrible? It's true I've devoted myself to work. Is that a crime? Hasn't my family had the benefit? And what's the result? They loathe me.

DICK (*slowly*). I don't know that you're to blame exactly. One doesn't blame people for being what they are. But I *do* think you've gone on the wrong track.

WILFRED. I wish you'd tell me how.

DICK. Well, for one thing, you've been too logical.

WILFRED. Too logical?

DICK. You've grasped the fact—I suppose it is a fact . . . that work is the most important thing in life—and you promptly jumped to the conclusion that it's the *only* thing—and *that's* where you've slipped up.

WILFRED. Perhaps I have been too ambitious.

DICK. Not so much too ambitious as too consistent. Drive anything to extremes and it becomes ridiculous. (*Gets nearer to WILFRED.*) You see, old boy (*hand on WILFRED's shoulder*), this world isn't a frightfully happy place—there's so darned much that's disagreeable that what we all *ache* for is a little relief. Cheerfulness and that. No one wants to contemplate a solemn person, steadily pushing along his upward path, behaving irreproachably and never smiling. It's too damned depressing. And you've been worse than that.

WILFRED. Worse?

DICK. You've not only behaved that way yourself, but you've wanted your family to do the same. And so they jibbed.

WILFRED. You may be right, Richard, but if I have been wrong . . . I'm paying . . . Alice gone . . . Jill gone . . . there's only Jack . . . left.

(*POWERS comes in door up stage L. with a note on a tray.*)

POWERS (*comes to WILFRED*). This has just come by hand, sir. (*Retreats up stage a little after giving note.*)

WILFRED. Thank you. (*He tears it open, glances through it, then collapses.*)

POWERS. Is there any answer, sir?

WILFRED. No, thank you.

POWERS. I'm sorry to trouble you again, sir, but the plumber has arrived, and he says he *must* see you, sir. He says it's too big a job to take on without he sees the master. (*Standing just below table up c.*)

WILFRED. Oh dear . . . everything at once! . . . All right, I'll come. (*He crosses over to below desk.*)

(*DICK is now up chair R., end of settee R.*)

POWERS. Very good, sir. I'll tell him.

(*She goes out door up L.*)

WILFRED (*turns to DICK*). He won't come back.

DICK. Who? (*Standing in front of settee R.*)

WILFRED. Jack. I asked him to come home again. I told him he could do what he liked.

DICK. What's he say?

WILFRED (*hands DICK letter*). Feels happier where he is. Thinks he can work better there.

DICK (*reads letter and gives it back*). H'm! . . . that's unfortunate.

WILFRED (*goes up c. towards door up stage*). Can't be helped. (*He goes to door.*) Don't go, Richard—I'll be back in a minute. Stop to dinner. (*c.*)

DICK. I say I'm most awfully sorry, but I'm booked.

WILFRED. Oh, well, it's of no consequence.

DICK. But I'll wait a bit if you like. I'm in no hurry.

WILFRED. Thank you, I shall be grateful.

(*Exits door up L.*)

(*ALICE comes in agitatedly double doors L.*)

DICK (*goes up stage C. as ALICE enters, turns in surprise*). Alice, I thought you'd gone!

ALICE. It's no use, Dick. I can't do it. I'm going to stay.

DICK. Oh, Lord! What's up now?

ALICE. I know it's idiotic . . . but I can't help it . . . I can't leave him alone. I can't do it. I must stop.

DICK (*hotly*). You'll do no such thing. I won't let you. Do you realize it's a life sentence if you do? (*L. of her.*)

ALICE. Yes . . . I realize. (*Both standing in front of C. settee.*)

DICK. Then, why? What's made you alter?

ALICE. Everything . . . I can't explain.

DICK. But you *must* explain! Don't you see it's your one chance of freedom? There'll never be another.

ALICE. He's so helpless.

DICK. Helpless be blowed! He's not an infant. He can manage.

ALICE. Manage! Wilfred! . . . Why, he can't even talk to the plumber. Oh, it's been growing on me all the time I've been listening.

DICK. Upon my soul, if women aren't the limit! Just when it's all arranged . . .

ALICE. Stu . . . stupid sex, eh, Dick?

DICK. Well . . . can you give me *one* sensible reason?

ALICE. Habit . . . age . . . I don't know . . .

DICK. What utter rot! Why, you talk as if you were ninety. You're a young woman, really.

ALICE. I've not felt young—the last three days. (*Slowly.*) The truth is . . . I'm too old to uproot.

DICK. And so this is what you've been working up to, with your good-byes and your dusters and all. Pure sentimentality of the worst sort. (*Crosses down R. below settee.*)

ALICE. I don't care. I'm not ashamed of it. (*Sits C. settee.*)

DICK. And yet three days ago, you said all those awful things you told me about.

ALICE. What's that got to do with it? Have you never lost your temper, Dick?

DICK (*snappily*). Yes. I've lost it now. (*Moves up to her R.*)

ALICE. You'll find it again.

DICK. You mean . . . you're really determined? (*Sits on her R.*)

ALICE. I'm not. It's determined for me.

(*There is a slight pause.*)

DICK. Well, I suppose I ought to have known. (*Rises and goes to R. corner.*) They do say it's only a fool interferes between married couples.

ALICE. And they're right, Dick.

DICK. There we are! Now you're going to blame it on me. If that isn't a woman all over!

ALICE. No, I don't blame you. I'm sure you meant well, dear.

DICK (*violently*). Good God! (*Crossing up L. to L. of ALICE.*) Well, of course that puts the lid on it. We all know the person who means well!

ALICE (*rises*). Will you . . . will you tell him I'm here?

DICK (*waving his arms*). Oh, anything . . . anything you like. (*Crosses to folding doors L., turns and comes to her L. He hesitates, then crosses to her. Gruffly.*) You're a damned fool, Alice!

ALICE (*takes his hand*). Thank you, dear. . . .

(*He pats her shoulder comfortingly.*)

And, Dick . . . for goodness' sake separate him from the plumber. He'll blow the house up or something.

DICK. Oh, damn the plumber! (*He goes out double doors L.*)

(*ALICE gradually dries her tears, then gets up and slowly takes off her outdoor things, smooths her hair and so on. WILFRED enters door up L.*)

(*Light for WILFRED, as ALICE gets ready.*)

WILFRED (*coming to her L.*). Alice! It's true? . . . You've come back?

ALICE. Yes . . . I've come back.

WILFRED. Can you forgive me? (*They are standing in front of C. settee.*)

ALICE. That's all right, Wilfred.

WILFRED. We can't break after all these years, can we?

ALICE. No.

(*They sit on C. settee. ALICE R., WILFRED L.*)

WILFRED (*with emotion*). If you knew how lonely . . .

ALICE. Poor boy . . .

WILFRED. It . . . it won't be too great . . . a sacrifice?

ALICE. No.

WILFRED (*brokenly*). Will you . . . tell me what made you . . . forgive? . . .

ALICE (*turns her head and looks at him*). Memory . . .

WILFRED. Memory?

ALICE. You wouldn't understand.

WILFRED. Won't you let me try?

ALICE. It's all so long ago . . . so faded . . . and now that we

sit here . . . two stolid, middle-aged people . . . it seems absurd . . . but once . . . you were my lover, Wilfred.

WILFRED. Alice . . . (*He takes her hand.*)

ALICE. It's . . . over. But there's one thing a woman never forgets . . . the tone of her lover's voice . . . the tone his voice takes . . . when he's in trouble and needs her. And when I heard you . . . bothered by all those horrid people (*breaks down*) . . . I couldn't stan . . . I just couldn't stan . . . that's all.

(*He raises her hand slowly to his lips and kisses it. There is a pause while they both recover. Then he gets up and moves down R.*)

WILFRED. Alice . . . I'm going to do what you want.

ALICE. I know.

WILFRED. It's all right with Jill and Roger, and Jack is to have his allowance. (*Moving behind desk.*)

ALICE. Yes, dear, I've heard. (*Still seated on C. settee.*)

WILFRED. And, Alice . . . (*Going up L. to window—behind desk.*) I'm going to give up . . . politics.

ALICE (*looks up quickly*). Give . . . them up . . . Wilfred?

WILFRED (*he is now behind C. settee and L. of it*). I've had time to think these three days, and I made up my mind, if you gave me another chance, that's what I'd do. I see now I've been selfish. In future, I shall live for you. We'll be together. (*Coming down L.*)

ALICE (*rather faintly*). To-together.

WILFRED. Always. I'll never leave you. (*Goes up L. to her.*) Jack and Jill are gone. If I went into Parliament you'd be alone. (*Kneeling on settee.*)

ALICE. Oh, Wilfred!

WILFRED. I've had a long talk with Dick and he's made it clear.

ALICE (*nodding her head, to herself*). Yes. I always knew Dick was a fool.

WILFRED. He made me see.

ALICE. Bu-but, Wilfred, I don't mind being alone. I like it.

WILFRED. It's wrong. Husband and wife should cleave. I'll do everything you want. We'll travel. We'll have change. I'll amuse you. (*Coming down L.*)

ALICE. Amuse me?

WILFRED. I'm going to make up for all the years I've bored you.

ALICE. It's . . . it's very good of you, Wilfred, but— (*She stands up decidedly.*) No! (*Comes down R.C.*)

WILFRED. No?

ALICE. I appreciate your thought . . . intensely. . . . But I couldn't accept . . . I should be miserable.

WILFRED (*goes to her—L.C.*). Don't you *want* to see more of me, Alice?

ALICE (*hastily*). Of course, dear. What a question! But . . . we . . . we mustn't think only of ourselves. You have duties, Wilfred.

WILFRED. Yes—at home.

ALICE (*panic-stricken*). No. Not at home—outside! Oh, Wilfred! Think—you have so often said the country needs you. That what is necessary is a—is a clarion voice in the councils of the nation. Someone who says what he thinks without fear or favour . . . and—and—so on.

WILFRED. I admit those *were* my opinions. (*Going R. round top end of desk.*)

ALICE (*urgently*). And still are. Believe me, one doesn't change in a minute.

WILFRED (*comes down R. below desk. Faint signs of inflation begin to appear*). Of course if you put it on the score of duty.

ALICE. I do. . . . Oh, I do, indeed.

WILFRED. In that case, I suppose I must defer to your wishes. (*He is now R.C.*)

ALICE (*overcome with relief, sinks into a chair*). Yes.

WILFRED (*going up L. round C. settee*). I will not deny, I never have denied, that in my opinion the times are dangerous. With Europe (*comes down R.*) in chaos, it is undoubtedly the moment for those of us who have a message to . . . er . . . to give it . . . There is a spirit abroad . . . which takes no account of *responsibility*, of *dignity*, or of *appearances*. (*Going up R.C.*)

(*ALICE gives a jump between each of the three words. He does not see it and goes on. ALICE buries her face in her hands.*)

And so if it is really your sincere wish that I should not give up my plans, that I should . . . (*He notices her attitude and stops short.*) Eh? What is it? What's the matter? (*He is now R. of ALICE and near her.*)

ALICE. Nothing, Wilfred.

WILFRED (*comes to her quickly and very anxiously*). You're not ill?

ALICE (*half laughing, half crying*). No, I'm not ill. It's only that just for the moment . . .


WILFRED. Yes, dear . . . what?

ALICE. I almost thought I was getting a slight . . . a very slight return (*in a smothered voice with laughter*) of my old deafness.

WILFRED (*stands petrified for a second, then throws himself beside her on his knees and buries his head in her lap*). Oh, my dear . . . my dear . . . I'm so sorry! . . .

(*She puts her hand gently on his head and looks down at him with understanding and pity. He holds her L. hand and kisses it.*)

CURTAIN.



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